

To Marina: It will be interesting to you what life was like. It's hard to imagine what times your grandmother Bella went through.

Aron Kosoy

Memories

June 1941- March 1944

Dedicated to the memory of my
Mother, Bella Aronovna Kosoy (Vilfand)

I am not a young person and even not middle aged. In a few months I'm going to be 90 years old.

Forgive me, for I forgot some names and events which I met on my life's journey. These days, many people cannot imagine or understand the difficult times their relatives went through.

So, 1941. I finished fourth grade. I was 12 years old, my brother Sem (Senya) turned 1 year old on June 18. In Kiev, the war came at dawn on June 22nd. At 4 in the morning, German planes bombed Kiev. It was a sunny Sunday. In the last days of June and beginning of July, the city mobilized its military. Nearly the whole male population aged 18 to 50 were called up to the Red Army. Among them was my father, Private Red Army soldier Faivish Kosoy. The city began evacuating east of the country and to the Central Asia republic. After a lot of hassle, we got our tickets on July 6, left everything we had in our room, in a communal apartment on Saksaganskogo Street 119. We took only a small suitcase and bag with groceries.

A pocket was sewed into my underpants. In it were placed 100 rubles and a note, on which was written: first name, last name, the address evacuated from and year of birth, just in case. Thank god that case passed me by. Our train was supposed to go to the freight station. The train was delayed because bombing began, but people did not run away and waited on the platform. In the evening, the freight train came, which contained forty-two axles. Wagons were delivered on the platform. So that there was no panic, next to each wagon stood Red Army soldiers. They rolled back the wide doors and boarding began. In the wagons were built wooden bunks on both sides, on which people began to settle down, with small children with their parents and older people on the first level.

A few times in the day the train stopped in the field and people ran to take care of their needs. We rarely stopped at stations where we could get boiling water. German planes flew over several times, explosions were heard, but thank god the train and railway tracks remained intact. On the tenth day the train stopped at Kuybyshev Station and within a few hours was supposed to go to Siberia. On the 7th day of the route, my brother got sick and we were advised to return to the evacuation center in Kuybyshev Station. We collected our belongings. At the evacuation center, they treated us with understanding and sent us to the Russian village Lepyagi, 30 kilometers from the city. In the village council, we were warmly greeted and directed to a hut where a 40 year single lady lived, Elena Solovova. Her husband was killed in the First World War, and her daughter worked in the city and lived in the dormitories.

Before the war, mama finished accounting courses and it was arranged for her to get a job as an accountant on a farm. My brother got a little stronger and in August went to a nursery, and from the first of September I was in 5th grade in a rural school. We settled and didn't go hungry. Life returned to normal. Sometimes with the rural children when it got dark, we went to the farm patch to get watermelons. The harvest was already collected and it was on large piles under the open sky, under the supervision of a watchman. From trenches, which had been preserved since times of the Civil War, we traveled on our bellies. We crawled quietly, so as to not wake up the watchman, who had a loaded cartridge with salt. In addition to watermelons, we searched for

sunflowers. We came into the landing, and tilting the bag of sunflowers with a stick, put shaved black ripe seeds into the bag.

Home, where we lived was located 100 meters from the Kuybyshev-Moscow railway. Day and night to the west flew military trains with tanks, artillery and trains with Red Army soldiers. Every day, with the guys, we went to the railway tracks and collected triangular letters, big and small, which the military threw from wagons and the platform. The letters were sent to the post-office. Everything would be good, but in 1941 a harsh winter came. The guards could not remember such a winter. The winter helped the Red Army stop the Germans before Moscow. We were completely unprepared. Mama went with me into the city, to the evacuation point. There, I was given a quilted jacket, padded trousers, white ushanka, and soldiers' boots and gloves.

The winter was extremely harsh, there were severe frosts. Mama received payment for workdays, a not big amount of money, potatoes, watermelon and sold milk. Having collected some amount of money, mama decided to move to a warmer climate in the beginning of December. Previously, she wrote to a friend who was evacuated to Dzhambul (Jambyl), Kazakhstan. We traveled by train non-stop for 5 days. In the city of Dzhambul, the temperature was above 0. We rented an apartment on the outskirts of the city not far from Kuybyshev Station. Mama got a job in an artel (corporate enterprise) as an assistant accountant; I went to school, and my brother went to a nursery.

I was responsible for providing fuel. At the freight station, they were allowed to sand and cut off the bark from logs. The main fuel was dry bushes and tumbleweed thorns; the railway sleepers were allowed to collect pieces of coal that spilled from the firebox of trains. Not far from home was an unpaved dirt road, where white sugar beetroots were transported from the state farm on britzkas (carts). The neighborhood kids brought me into their company. When a cart appeared in the distance, we hid under a bridge, under which a shallow ditch flowed. The cart would pass over the bridge, we quietly got out, each took two beets, and ran for cover.

At home the beets were cut into bits, boiled, and we got sweet water and boiled beets, which could be baked on a frying pan. I think they were tastier than cakes now. At the end of January 1942, I went to continue my studies in fifth grade. There were no difficulties in studying, as I had a reserve of knowledge. A lot of attention was paid to "military affairs" lessons. Every day there was drill training, rifle ownership, and assembly and disassembly of equipment. Class was friendly. On sunny days, drill training took place in the school yard.

The boys were put in one line and we marched along the yard. When we walked to the fence, the command "circle" was heard and the whole line turned 180 degrees and went in formation in the opposite direction. I stood last in line. When I passed by one of the lazy students, who was obviously passing the lesson, I heard "Abrasha." We marched back, I listened, and definitely again: "Abrasha." I tensed up when we passed by him again, it was definitely him. I instantly hit him with such force he fell and could not get up. The military commander ran up and said that I should take my backpack and go home. The next day, I came to school, nobody said anything to me, as if nothing had happened.

Mama worked as an assistant accountant in the corporate enterprise “Victory.” Her salary at that time was very low, on the order of 500 rubles per month. For my father, who was on the front, my mom received 100 rubles per month. At that time, at the bazaar 1 loaf of bread cost 200 rubles. We received bread cards, mama received 400 rubles, and my brother and I received 300 rubles. The cards were purchased at a bakery store. There would be a line a few hours before the store opened. Your number in line was written on your hand with a chemical pencil. However, you were supposed to be visually aware of people in front of you and behind you in line. There were cases when there was not enough bread for all the bread card holders. Mama thought about how to improve our financial situation. She remembered that when she got married and lived in the city Bila Tserkva, her young husband Faivish (our dad) worked as a soap maker. Mama went to the workshop, where soap was made, and saw how and from what they made laundry soap.

The chairman of corporate enterprise and the technologist liked the proposal to organize a soap factory and they got down to business. They purchased a barn and plot of land on the outskirts of the city. They built a firebox out of brick which the boiler was covered up with. The firewood was heated. They made a second boiler from which fat was heated. In the big boiler they poured fat, caustic soda and some other ingredients. Water from the ditch was carried in buckets. Major complications arose. We lived on the outskirts on the opposite side of the city. To get to work, you had to walk on foot twenty minutes, and more to the station. Cab drivers were arriving at the station. There were 10 people on the cart. Then from the last stop “at the bazaar,” it was needed to walk for about 25 minutes. And so the journey one way took more than an hour and a half. By that time, I visited the railway, school and Senya’s nursery.

Mama found a room closer to work about a 15-20 minute walk to the nursery and junior high school, which was located on Pushkinskaya Street. In fifth grade, I didn’t succeed due to the move, but the new school the following year accepted me into sixth grade without any problems. Those were the times, it was 1942. We moved to a private home on the bazaar street. Adobe walls, earthen floor, and a small window through which the sun never fell. The room was about 8 square meters. The house was inhabited by an elderly owner, hostess, and two granddaughters. One was older than me, and the other was younger. The family was dispossessed, and their son, from what I understood, was serving time in exile.

Opposite our doors, in a large bright room with two windows, lived a family evacuated from the city of Novohrad-Volynskyi. The head of the family was not of military age, his wife was younger, and his daughter was a medical student, but at that time was not studying or working. She had health problems. Their younger son, a year younger than me, was not sociable. They lived in isolation; nobody came into their room.

In the soap shop, work gradually began to improve. The work was hard and not for everyone. Mama and an assistant loaded the boiler the whole day. On the second day, a fire was lit under the boiler and the mixture was cooked, stirring until it was the required consistency. On the third day, a collapsible mold in the shape of a cube was installed. Liquid soap was poured into the mold using a metal ladle with a long handle. It was hot and steamy in the barn, breathing was difficult. Mama would come home tired and still managed time to prepare us something.

When the soap cooled and turned into a solid mass, the walls of the mold came off (they were not light in weight). Markings were made in the corners using strings with wooden handles. Layer by layer was cut off from both ends.

In the evening a watchman came, an old Kazakh with a hunting rifle, I don't know if he had cartridges. His task was to protect the socialist property. Life was getting better. Mother dug up a small plot of land near the soap shop and planted potato eyes (cut potatoes) and pumpkin, unfortunately the pumpkin did not germinate. By autumn we had a bag of potatoes that was stored under the bed. Mama brought home bits of soap. Not far from us lived a family, related to mama, where the lady worked at a meat processing plant. Sometimes, Fanya brought us beef lungs, and sometimes even cookies. The exchange of goods took place.

Mama used to cook meatballs with very small fish the size of a tulka (sardine), which boys sold in bowls. The fish was easy to clean, while the heads were processed. There was no fuel, but I didn't dream. In the evening, herd cows passed from the pasture and left "cakes" along the path. I took a bucket and collected manure. Near the barn the owner allowed me to make dung, to which I added dry grass and twigs. The cakes hung in the sun, burned well in the stove and turned to ash, which I gave to the owner to fertilize the soil.

In June, while outside, Mama randomly ran into a distant relative whom I talked to in my youth. Raisa Abramovna of Kharkiv graduated college, joined the Party, and got married. In the beginning of the war, her husband was mobilized, and she and the sewing factory ended up evacuating, in the city of Dzhambul. Raisa Abramovna did not receive letters from her husband for half a year. She didn't know if he was alive or not, and they didn't have any children. She worked two shifts as a supervisor in a cap sewing workshop. In the technical area there were tables and on each table there were several sewing machines. There were approximately 100 seamstresses working in the workshop and there was always a lot of noise from the sewing machines.

Everyone respected Raisa Abramovna. When they met, she offered to help mama with purchasing bread cards. At the factory, which worked for the needs of the war front, there was a bread store. The workshops stocked goods one by one in the order of the time allotted for them. Raisa registered our three bread cards - one for employees and two for dependents, i.e. 1 kg. bread per day, when baking bread, potatoes and something more. The whole factory knew about her meeting with mama. At the entrance of the workshop, everyone knew me and treated me with respect. Usually, Raisa Abramovna received bread and left it in a small box, which I took out of her desk drawer. So I stopped standing in line for bread and I had more relatively free time.

The year was 1942. After moving to a new living place, Senta went to nursery and I went to sixth grade in September. At school, there was a semi-military order. When the teacher entered the class, the duty officer shouted in a loud commanding voice: "Stand up! Attention." He approached the teacher and reported: "There are this many people present at geometry lesson... according to the list... absent... people for known or unknown reasons." Then the teacher said: "Sit down" and the regular lesson began.

Each day was a “Military Affairs” lesson, where the guys learned to march, march in formation, own a rifle, etc. The military instructor taught without experience, but went through schooling at the front. The duty officer compiled a list of those present and collected 5 kopecks from each, and at the big break, they received donuts. Very tasty donuts, but small. The textbooks were old, as they were passed from older to younger classes. One textbook for 3-4 students. Instead of notebooks, we wrote on brochures dedicated to festive State events. They were published in huge editions and the brochure costs 2 kopecks.

In class, there were many evacuees. Senya went to the nursery, which was located 10 minutes away walking from school. It was a bright one-story building with a large yard where children could run, have three meals a day, and have their own bed, with friendly teachers and nannies. But as they say: “the music didn’t play for long, the guy didn’t have fun for long.” At the end of September, Senya got sick and I had to stay home. Before the end of the year, we tried a few more times to take him to the nursery, but he couldn’t stand it for more than a week. Besides, he had a poor appetite and he loved to run.

I had to leave school until the spring. I continued to visit the nursery with a jar and saucepan, since everything the children were entitled to was given home. There were no toys at home, but Senya amused himself with boxes, trinkets, etc. He had one big stick, which he threw into a small and not deep ditch-stream, in which water flowed for irrigation and organization of the land. One day, he slipped and fell into the ditch, but I managed to run up and pull him out. With the arrival of spring 1943, our dream came true, Senya went to kindergarten, and I went to school. I had some textbooks at home: trigonometry and algebra, sometimes in Russian. I solved all the problems in the math textbook, checking the answers at the end of the book. It was fun at school, they played soccer on the playground and I soon got onto the team, ran quickly and had good ball control.

Not far from the school was located the city stadium Spartak. I was interested, but they only accepted me into only one section, “boxing.” I came to training, did warm-up exercises, and the coach gave everyone boxing gloves and divided us into pairs. Obviously, it was necessary to work on the elementary exercises of combat, hooks, uppercuts, etc. My partner, a year older than me, started running from one side to the other and then hit me in the face. I tried to hit him too, but he dodged. After some time he again hit me in the face, and after some more minutes again hit me. I got angry and just beat him up without any technique. The coach came, saw the scene, took the gloves from me and said that I shouldn’t come anymore.

In the beginning of April 1943, an order came to the school - to allocate a certain number of students to be sent to FZO (factory training school). I was a suitable candidate for enlistment since I was absent a lot and had poor training. In the evening, mama came home from work tired, but I told her too. The next day in the morning, she didn’t go to work, picked up Senya from the nursery, and went to the school directly to the principal. I don’t know what she talked about, but after half an hour, she got me crossed off the list and I continued my studies at school.

On May 20 exams began. On mathematical subjects I had no problems, but there were big deficiencies in geography, language, and other subjects. I remember when I received the

exam card for geography, I read it out loud, sat down at my desk, and then walked along the walls where maps were allowed. I had to show some islands. I went up to the map, fixed it, and my friend quietly showed me with his finger: higher, lower, left, right, and gave the sign I got it. I read the name of the island. I passed the exams and was promoted to 7th grade.

There was anxiety in the city. Periodically, bandits came at night, broke into the walls of houses and killed people, and after the robbery they went to the mountains, which were visible on clear sunny days. This went on for a long time. The local police were helpless. The city authorities turned to the capital of the republic, Alma-Ata, and after some time, troops from the (MVD) Ministry of Internal Affairs arrived in cars, set up ambushes and then surrounded the robbers in the mountains. Some of the bandits were destroyed, while the remaining group surrendered. Most of them were deserters and plunderers.

In the summer there was a trial in the city cinema. The trial lasted several weeks. People from enterprises were invited to attend the hearing, so there were no people who just wanted to listen and watch. The sentence was harsh - execution.

I spent the summer holidays at home. I rarely managed to get books from the city library. On the plot of land where the house stood, a large hole 2 meters deep and 15 meters long was dug during construction. The soil was used to build walls. Periodically, the owner drained the water from the stream and filled the hole with water. Within a few days the water seeped into the ground, leaving behind small living fish at the bottom.

For a few days, while the water was in the reservoir, we were able to swim. I learned how to float on water and swim doggy-style. There was a friend of mine, a year younger, who lived not far from me. Sometimes I went to his place to play caps/hats. The owner of the house was a Kazakh, and his children with a group of local children sat at the bridge of the stream, which was located at the mountains. My friend walked across the bridge and was not bothered, but when I appeared, everyone shouted in unison: "Abrasha! Abrasha!" And sometimes they threw rocks. When there were 2-3 people at the stream, they would pretend not to see me.

One sunny day, I was walking with a friend from school, and about 100 meters away from us was walking a pot-bellied Kazakh. He took out a handkerchief to wipe away sweat, and something fell out of his pocket. He was coming from the bazaar. He reached the street crossing and crossed. We walked around and saw 1, 3, 5, and 10 ruble bills scattered. We looked around. Nobody was close by. We quickly gathered the money in our pockets. At home I counted 874 rubles. In the evening, I gave it all to mama.

Mama's sister, Anya, and grandma, were living in the city of Tashkent at that time. In July, Anya sent me an invitation to visit for a month. At the card office, I handed in my dependent card and received 500 gram coupons, which could be used to shop wherever you wanted in the Soviet Union. There were no problems with getting a railway ticket to Tashkent. I left in the general carriage of the passing train with a stop transfer at Arris. At the post office I sent a telegram that I would be arriving on such a train. My grandmother met me at the station and we went to the tram stop. On my shirt was a little icon C, "Sparktak." A boy a couple years

older than me ran up and offered to buy the icon for 100 rubles. I refused, and he offered 200 rubles.

I refused. Grandma got worried. In her opinion, the icon was worth a kopeck (penny), but I was unshakeable. I lived for a month in paradise. There were many friends in the alley who I played soccer with, and at night I went to the summer theater. I liked the city. We used to ride on the tram with the guys on the grids and ate sausage (adapted for attaching the second tram). With fresh air and a breeze.

One beautiful day, I walked past the district military registration and enlistment office and was overcome by a passion of romance. Patriotism seized me. I walked in. In the first room sat an officer on duty with the rank of captain. There were rank ribbons on the left side of his chest and on the right there were three ribbons - two yellow (severe wounds), and one red (light). He nodded his head for me to sit down and ask what was the matter. I responded to him that I wanted to be on the Front. He froze, his eyes began to widen, and his face turned purple. I don't know what he remembered. In one moment, he jumped up and I couldn't tell if he wanted to grab me by the collar or hit me. But I ended up being more agile, and in one moment I was at the door. There were no more efforts to go to the Front.

Time flew quickly and I was back in Dzhambul. When I was in Tashkent, Mama took Senya with her to work and he spent time in the fresh air. Letters from my father rarely came. Obviously, many letters disappeared for various reasons. It was very scary to see an old Jewish postman walking in the alley with a large bag. There were many funerals. Sometimes in a random yard would be a scream and crying. Everyone understood that bad news had come to the house.

Autumn of 1943 came. In September, I went to school and Senya went to kindergarten. In October, he got sick and I stopped going to school. In November, Mom's younger sister, Anya, came to visit us. She stayed with us for a few days, got upset and promised to take us back to Tashkent. In November they reported on the radio that Kiev had been liberated from the Nazi Fascists. In honor of this event, I set off fireworks - set fire to a pack of matches.

On the plot of the house, there was a small black dog running around, half-starved. One day on the street she pestered the owner of the house and ended up in the yard. Everyone played with her. After a couple of months the dog Zhutka was gone, the owner sold it.

One beautiful day, my brother's temperature went up and Mom advised me to give him warm milk. Mama gave me a half-liter jar, 10 rubles and said where to buy it. I approached a house surrounded by a high fence. I called out. The elderly owner came out and immediately understood what I needed. "Come into the yard," he said, and took the jar and went to pour milk. The dog was on a leash, it barked and started to lunge at me. The owner said that I should come closer. I didn't feel like saying that I was afraid of the dog, so I approached. The dog began to jump and lick me. This was Zhutka, even though time passed, she recognized me. I was deeply touched.

Our housemates moved out and we took over their bright room. At the turn of 1944, Mama received a ration of 0.5 liters of vodka. Senya slept and me and Mama poured 30 grams of

vodka and celebrated the new year. Afterwards, Mama filled the bottle with water to .5 liters and soon sold it on the market. At the end of January, we received a call and permission to move to the city of Tashkent. The preparations were short and at the beginning of March, having collected our things and all our property, we made the cherished move to Tashkent.

I went to school to get a document saying that I completed seventh grade. The young clerk took the class magazine and saw that I was not certified in either the first or second quarter. I asked her: "Give me the grades for the fourth quarter that I had in individual subjects." She thought about it, filled out the first quarter and gave me the report card. Mid year grades I put down myself when I was in Tashkent.

Our life has changed for the better. I have warm and pleasant memories from my stay in Uzbekistan.