

Sophia Zinger



This is a pencil portrait of my wife Sophia Zinger, nee Belinskaya, made by an inmate of a camp for prisoners of war in Voronezh in 1945. I met my future wife when I was in the camp for prisoners-of-war in Voronezh in 1944. There was a house across the street from the building of the headquarters where we lived. I often saw a girl in a window. There was a big family living in that house. I often watched them through the window. It was an episode of peaceful life, associated with home. There was a river and a pump nearby where people came for water. We went to swim in the river and often saw this girl, who came with her buckets to get water. Once I took the courage to talk with her. I was wearing a German uniform that Germans had given me for my work. Those Germans didn't know that I was a Jew since I spoke fluent German. I also spoke Russian. I talked with the girl and asked if I could see her in the evening. I longed for talking with someone. I was afraid that she would refuse since she didn't know who I was. She agreed and we met in the evening. I chose a spot where nobody could see us since inmates of the camp weren't allowed to be outside in the evening. We walked and talked. It was like a holiday for me. We began to see each other more often. I brought her food that we received in the camp. Her name was Sophia Belinskaya. I didn't know who she was. She looked like a gypsy girl. Once she told me that her mother told her to stop seeing me. She thought I was a German and might kill her. We talked more and she told me that she was a Jew. I confessed that I was a Jew, too. Her mother didn't believe it was true. She said there were only German inmates in the camp. I began to come to her home in the evening when nobody could see me. Sophia lived in a big family. There were seven children and Sophia was the oldest. She was born in 1924. Sophia's mother was a housewife. Her father left their family. I tried to support their family as much as I could. Once Sophia's mother invited me to lunch. I understood that she wanted to talk to me and find out whether I could speak Yiddish. By the end of my visit she knew that I spoke better Yiddish than she did. After that Sophia's mother wasn't afraid of me any more and I visited them every evening. In May 1945 we heard that the war was over. I hoped to be able to go home soon. I had no information about my family. Sophia and I

decided to get married but postponed it until we came to my home. We wanted to celebrate our wedding with my family. I asked Ptashynskiy, the chief of the camp who was Jewish, to get some information about the situation in Subcarpathia. He sent a request about my family and received a response saying that no member of my family was alive. I went to Uzhgorod. Some other people lived in the house of my sister Helena. I tried to have the house returned to me. The verdict of the court was positive and I got back the house. I went to Voronezh to take Sophia to our home. We returned to Uzhgorod where Sophia and I got married in 1946. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. We had a civil registration ceremony at the district registry office.