

Gessel Ferdmann



This is my father Gessel Ferdmann at home sitting at the sewing machine. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 1955 shortly after father's return from the camp.

After the war my father was in charge of a shoe workshop. He did not have a very professional accountant and in a while he had a discrepancy between the cash and the reports. There was a surplus in the till of 1,200 rubles. In 1950 there was an audit at the workshop and the surplus was seized. I went to the sixth grade at that time. It was January 1950. I remember how they came to our place for a search. It was dreadful for me. Of course, they did not find anything, but they arrested Mother. I stayed by myself. I was watched and assisted by my kind neighbors. Father was sentenced to eight years in prison, then they thought it was not enough and they added another two years, that is, ten years in total. Mother was in Tallinn jail. I went to see both Mother and Father, brought them some food. It was such a bad time!

Mother was in prison for a relatively short term: eight months. They did not find her guilty and let her go. She had to work as Father was in prison. First, she was employed at a textile store as a saleswoman. Then she went to work for a dairy store. Father stayed in Tallinn. Here we had a camp at Magazinin Street. Usually they did not imprison people in the city where they were from. For example, a prisoner from Tallinn was sent to Kostroma and one from Kostroma in Tallinn. It was done so that it would be hard for the relatives to go and see prisoners, for them to feel left out from ordinary life, for the hardship of prison to be felt dramatically. Father had many friends and they managed that he could stay in Tallinn. Mother and I went to see Dad, and at times we left things for him.

My father's pardon was an unbelievable concurrence of circumstances. Some official happened to live in the house, where we were living after the war. In the apartment one floor below us lived the Estonian writer August Jakobson, who was a Soviet writer. After the war, my father decided to make clothes to have an additional income. He did well and soon he became a good tailor.

Yakobson ordered suits from my father and came to our place. Then Yakobson was elected the chairman of The Presidium of the Supreme Council of Estonia. At that time his family moved to the place where the members of the government resided. That August Yakobson exempted my father. It turned out that Yakobson sent a request to the camp asking for the characteristics of the prisoner Ferdmann. He had excellent characteristics and the Presidium of Supreme Council pleaded for my father's pardon. It was unbelievable and I will never forget it.

Father was pardoned, and he had no right to live in Tallinn until his sentence expired. No matter that he was pardoned, his rights were restricted. The fact that he was bereft of his voting right, was of no importance to my father, but it was very hard for him to be separated from his family. Father was registered in the Tallinn suburb Keila. He was formally there, but in actuality he was living with us.