

Minna Birman And Her Husband's Sister Mariana Aihenvald



This is me, Minna Birman, with my husband's sister Mariana Aihenvald. This photo was taken in Tashkent in 1942.

During the Great Patriotic War we were in evacuation in Tashkent [3.200 km from Odessa in Uzbekistan]. I went to work at the Tashkent agricultural machine building plant that manufactured shells and repaired tanks at that period. There were vacancies in a foundry and I went to work

there. I was a core rod installer installing core rods into shells. We worked 12 hours per day. There were Uzbek workers as well. They didn't speak Russian and didn't understand anything. They were constantly scolded. They had to carry such heavy loads that we felt sorry for them, even though our life was as rough. Thus, I heard some Uzbek talking about 'zhydy' [abusive word for a Jew] behind my back on a bus. I turned to them and said that in that case they were 'sarty', abusive for Uzbek people. They were about to beat me.

In Tashkent we received 800 grams bread per day per our bread coupons and workers of the foundry received a free lunch and additional 200 grams of bread. It was a miserable lunch with flour prevailing in dishes. There was a spontaneous market near the entrance to the plant where workers were selling their ration of bread. 800 grams was the weight of a loaf of bread. I went to the market once and found out that selling one loaf I could buy enough food for my whole family. I sold a loaf every other day buying rice and even plant oil. Uzbeks delivered milk to houses. They sold it on credit. We were surprised, but our landlady explained that there were no local customers to buy it anyways and all they wanted was selling it one way or another. I also donated blood and received additional food for it. Some time later my father went to work at the Tashkent town executive committee, but their ration of food was small and my father was swollen from hunger. My mother and I had pellagra [Editor's note: disease caused by lack of nicotinic acid and some other vitamins of B group].

My husband's sister Mariana Aihenvald also was evacuated to Tashkent. After the war she and her husband Naum Aihenvald settled there.