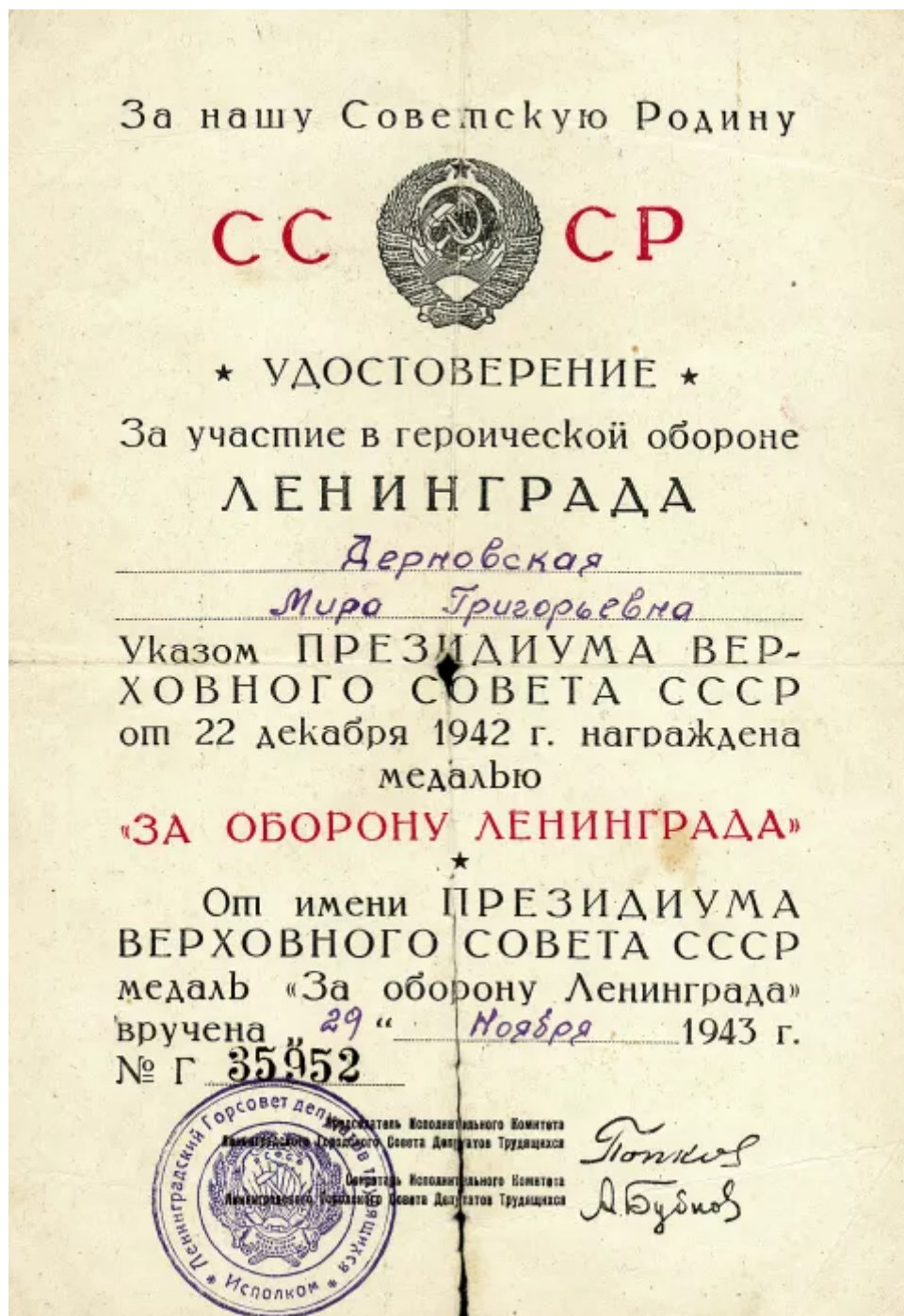


Mira Dernovskaya's Award 'For The Defense Of Leningrad'



This is the award 'For the Defense of Leningrad', which I received as a schoolgirl in 1943.

During the autumn and winter of the blockade of Leningrad we didn't study at school. Classes began only in May 1942.

I received that medal as a pupil of the 5th form, for my work in an agricultural farm near my school in the summer and autumn of 1942, and then in 1943 and 1944, to provide Leningradians with

potatoes and other vegetables.

We lived in a large barrack. I remember how we dug up potatoes in September. It was prohibited to take potatoes out of the farm, they even used to search us, but all of us were hungry and we ate them right there in the field uncooked.

Before the war, in May 1941, Mum and I were on vacation. Mum was pregnant that year, and was expecting a baby. In August we returned to Leningrad.

Father was at defense works at that time. When father returned from defense works, it was already impossible to leave, the city was under complete blockade. On 9th December 1941 Mum gave birth to a girl.

The girl was called Lilya. Daddy worked in a hospital as a tailor and spent all day there. Daddy died of exhaustion earlier than Lilya. Both died in 1942. We remained with Mum the two of us.

There was a period, when Mum didn't rise from bed at all, and it seemed that she would never get up again. But she rose. It was a miracle.

One of Daddy's fellow countrymen arrived with a food products caravan from Ladoga. He had dropped in to us to find out whether Daddy was alive. He left his ration for us, mainly bread, and Mum had a chance to eat a little and recover.

When Mum was sick and was lying in hospital in the winter of 1942, the yard-keeper started to steal our firewood, and he did it openly before my own eyes. And I, a small, but a very resolute girl, went to complain to the public prosecutor - someone must have advised me to do that.

The public prosecutor listened to me and made a telephone call. The larceny stopped, but I was uneasy all the same, and we took all the firewood with the help of my neighbor inside, chopped and sawed it in the kitchen, and then piled it up in the room. In the spring of 1942 an artillery shell hit our house, but our apartment remained intact.

Mum had no profession. She went to work in a hospital, where she repaired soldiers' regimentals, and at the end of 1944, when the Military Medical Academy returned from evacuation, she got a job in the laundry there.

She washed, ironed and sorted out linen, and did all the various assignments in the laundry. After a while she was transferred to the position of cloakroom attendant in another clinic of the Military Medical Academy, where she worked up to her retirement in 1962.