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11. The author with a benevolent smile, 2005.  
Photo: Todor Mitov.

This is a story about episodes of my life in relation to minerals and about thoughts that determined my actions. I would like to hope that many of them were ‘from God’ (Fig. 11).

### Family

I would refer my ancestors to the Bulgarian intelligentsia (highly educated patriotically-minded people). Both grandfathers and parents, and a brother with his wife lived by ideals, which they believed all their lives. They were teachers, doctors, lawyers, writers, diplomats. Father's sister, Dr Mara Maleeva, was the wife of Todor Zhivkov<sup>1</sup>. When they went the antifascist underground in 1944, my parents took their two-year-old daughter Lyudmila Zhivkova to our family to bring up with their two children – my brother and me - and pledged to raise the girl if her parents died in the anti-fascist struggle. My uncle was an international brigadier in Spain, my wife's father is a Hero of the Soviet Union, ace pilot, and member of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union. We grew up with love for the Soviet Union and the Soviet people. In Sofia, we studied at a Russian school, and for the last two years, in connection with my father's work abroad, I studied at a Russian school in Prague. My wife Jenny and I are members of the May 9<sup>th</sup> Immortal Regiment. I carry a portrait of my cousin, at the age of 18, a wounded partisan who was shot. Jenny carries a portrait of her father. All of us – my brother, Jenny and me dreamed of studying in Moscow, and our dream came true. We were all straight A-students, although I considered the collection of minerals to be my main life work, and my studies and dissertation were secondary matters in importance.

### Love for Minerals.

#### Mining engineer Evgeniy Mairovich. Museums

I have loved stones since I can remember myself. I collected them, wherever I could, on the banks of rivers and the sea, on outcrops in the valleys of streams and rivers, in the mountains, on mine dumps, in cabinets with friends. It was so nice to hold the boulder in hands and apply it to my cheek. I could admire the treasure endlessly. My favorite place in Sofia was the mineral hall in the Natural History Museum.

I memorized what minerals looked like, and I repeated the names of minerals and deposits like a prayer. In a museum on Wenceslas Square in Prague, I wrote down the names of unfamiliar minerals and read about them at home. Gauerite, boleite, egeran... At the Prague school, I was allowed to stay after school in the chemistry room



to determine minerals from the school mineralogical collection with a blowpipe. I remember how my chemistry teacher was very anxious because I inhaled mercury vapor, determining moschellandsbergite. She forced me to drink a lot of milk and she let me take some samples for my collection

Museums with mineral collections were my Temples of Mother Earth. I have visited these museums in dozens of countries, where I became acquainted with employees who wholeheartedly love minerals and their work. The most dear and beloved for me is the Fersman Mineralogical Museum in Moscow. It is not only because of the exceptional exhibits, displays and general atmosphere, but also thanks to the people who work today and who worked there in the past. A special place in the museum is the research center headed by Leonid Pautov. Here reigns an atmosphere created by a bright constellation in the mineralogical

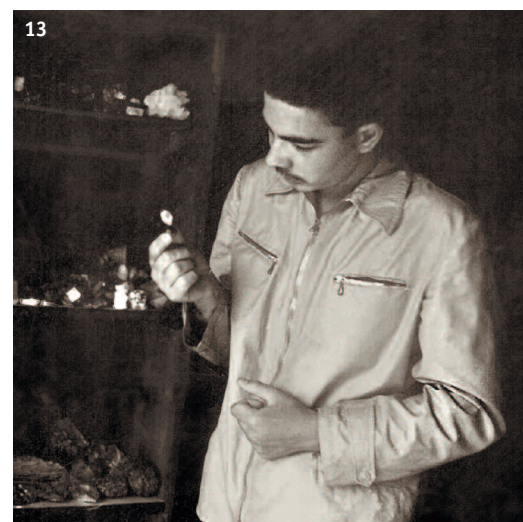
12. Mining engineer Evgeniy Mairovich with his collection of minerals, Sofia, 1975.  
*From the family archive.*

13. Beautiful rock crystal in my collection, 1955. *From the family album.*

14. The path is long, and there is no turning back, 1956.  
*From the family album.*

<sup>2</sup> “Monday begins on Saturday” is science fantasy novel about fanatic scientists by Soviet writers Boris and Arkady Strugatsky.

<sup>3</sup> Betekhtin, A.G. (1950) Mineralogy. Moscow: Gosgeoltekhizdat, 956 p. (in Russian).



sky. For these people ‘Monday begins on Saturday’<sup>2</sup>. Leonid's students have already become famous mineralogists. At each of our meetings, Lenya proudly talks about his new pupils.

My first steps into the mineralogical world were marked by my acquaintance with Evgeniy Mairovich (Fig. 12), then one of the largest mineral collectors in Bulgaria, the most authoritative mining engineer, researcher, technologist, and public person with broad interests. We have been friends for many years. The National Museum of Natural History and Sofia University have hundreds of unique specimens of minerals from the deposits where he worked. His apartment was a Mecca for mineral amateurs. Dozens of scientific works by Bulgarian mineralogists were based on his collection: columbite and beryl from Vishcheritsa; stilbite from Fotinovo; anthophyllite, vermiculite, actinolite and talc from Avren; dodecahedral chalcopyrite from the Strashimir deposit; epidote from Nova Mahala. In the distant 1950s, I entered his house with excitement and found myself in a mineralogical paradise, where I could hold a specimen in my hand and leaf through the thick mineralogy book of the Betekhtin's 1950 edition<sup>3</sup>. Large crystals stood like soldiers on plaster pedestals, while smaller ones were glued on pins screwed into lead hemispheres. The forty-year difference in age did not interfere with our friendship. I remember with what pride I met him at our house when he came to see my collection (Figs. 13 and 14). He introduced himself to my mother with a smile: ‘I am Misha's friend.’ He graduated from the Technische Universität Berlin and worked there as a pianist, voicing silent films. It amazed me that he remembered what minerals the professor had examined him on.