

Nikita D. Vvedenskaya

Party at the home of Nikita Vvedenskaya, Moscow September 16, 1989

Highlights

A. Admissions Interview with Vinogradov (Part 1, 0:00-2:10)

E. D. Nikita, I think you wanted to share with us a story that might be historically valuable, didn't you?

N. V. Yes. When I was applying for a graduate program at the Steklov Institute, I had an interview with Ivan Matveevich. I had seen him once before during one of our skiing trips with Alik [Berezin]. At that particular moment I didn't notice anything strange about him. This time, however, he was moving in an awkward way and making strange gestures with his hands. Obviously, I was very nervous. He asked me what month it was. Thoroughly befuddled, I told him: "September" -- which was true.

E. D. I think he wanted to hear how you pronounce it.

N. V. Yes. Then he asked another weird question: "Why do you have this last name?" Being used to answer questions about my first name, I wasn't prepared for this one. I said: "Because it's my dad's last name." (*Everyone laughs*).

E. D. This is completely true.

N. V. At this point the interview was over. But, as I left the room, I was followed by Borozdin, the scientific secretary of the Institute, who asked: "What's your mother's maiden name?" Her maiden name is Kallistova, which just like my dad's name is very common among the clergy.

E. D. For Ivan Matveevich this is the best kind of recommendation one could provide because his family also comes from a clerical background.

B. Berezin's Story about Rashevsky¹ (Part 5, 19:00-end)

N. V. One time Alik Berezin was assigned to give a talk at methodological seminar about the role of the individual in history. Alik said that he argued in a standard way that the individual plays no role in history.² When he finished, Pyotr Konstantinovich [who lead the seminar at that time] objected: "How can it not play an important role in history? Remember that Czar Alexander II decided to free the peasants despite the reactionary views of prevalent in Russian society. Now imagine what would have happened if Alexander hadn't freed the peasants. If he hadn't done that, a revolution would have been inevitable, and Russia would have followed a normal bourgeois path of development. [Everyone laughs]. Since this happened in the heyday of communism, Alik was very impressed.

C. A Suitcase of Tip-off (Part 1, 6:05-6:55)

N. V. What I am going to say now is incapable of proof, and perhaps you will reproach me for disseminating rumors.

E. D. This is not a session of the court here. So you can say pretty much whatever you want provided only that you indicate that you cannot vouch for the truth of your statements.

N. V. Rumor has it that Ivan Matveevich collected confidential tip-offs against the employees of the Institute.

E. D. And he used them to manipulate them.

N. V. Yes, apparently. But the saddest part of this story (from the point of view of history) is that after Ivan Matveevich passed away Yevgeny Frolovich Mischenko, who was involved in dividing Vinogradov's inheritance, burnt it. This is what people say.

E. D. Well, Yevgeny Frolovich is the object of many rumors.

¹Pyotr K. Rashevsky (1907-1983) - Professor of Mekhmat. See <http://dfgm.math.msu.su/rashevski.htm>

² A classic Marxist position articulated in the famous essay of Plekhanov, "The Role of Individual in History."

N. V. If this is true, what a pity!

D. Kolmogorov about Arnold (Part 1, 17:30-19:04)

N. V. Here is an extract from a speech of Kolmogorov in which he honoured Arnold. It was delivered on June 13, 1987. Pay attention to this wonderful opening: "If I had the opportunity, I would express my deep conviction to all members of our faculty that today we are honoring the foremost Soviet mathematician. He is the foremost not only in terms of his scientific achievements, but also in terms of his personality, ability to learn new things and venture bravely into new uncharted territory. What always strikes me about Arnold is his intensity. Everything he does, he does with absolute commitment. If he studies birds, he needs to know all their names. If he goes ice swimming, he sets no time limit. If he goes skiing, he runs tirelessly and lightly clothed. 60-70km was a regular distance for him. I never asked him in much detail, but I know that today he can cover a distance of 70-80km without any difficulty only while normally wearing only his swimming trunks. His physical prowess is almost limitless. He can cover long distances even in snowstorm, which seems completely incomprehensible. Ask him a question on any subject, and you will find a boundless wealth of learning."