

Memorabilia

Episodes from the Past

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Labels

We label our seeds when we sow them in beds. The labels are small painted wooden boards with plant names and numbers. In the early 80's A.K. Skvortsov was in charge of the USSR Flora Department. My beds were located in the most remote, wild corner of the Botanic Garden where visitors rarely wandered. One evening Alexey Konstantinovich came to see me there. It was already getting dark by the time we had finished looking at my plants. On our way back, some spooky *bomzh** suddenly materialized in front of us. I wanted to point out to my boss the hardships I (then a very young woman) often had to endure at work, and so I said:

“Alexey Konstantinovich, just watch this suspicious character!”

AK contemplated the man and said pensively:

“Yes, this is indeed a suspicious person, though I don't think he is going to pull our labels out.”

*Translator's Note: *Bomzh* = 'a homeless person,' a popular acronym composed of beginnings of the following words, with which the Soviet bureaucracy identified the homeless: '[a person] without a particular place of residence.'



A.K. Skvortsov in the Botanical Garden, Moscow.

Youth

When Alexey Konstantinovich was 80 or maybe even 80-something, he was asked about the age of another professor. Skvortsov replied promptly and apparently quite seriously:

“Oh, but he is still quite young, just about my age.”

Shatko the Son

Once, when Volodya Shatko was still a young parent, he brought in a photo of his three-year-old. In the picture, the cute boy was riding a tricycle along a garden path. Everyone took a look and praised the kid. Being near-sighted, Alexey Konstantinovich took off his glasses when his turn came, positioned his nose against the photo, and explored it very closely for a long time. Finally, when everyone around had begun to wonder at this unprecedented interest in the child, Alexey Konstantinovich muttered with a great deal of disappointment:

“Can't figure out, what's growing in there...”



Alexey Skvortsov on field trips with Larisa Kramarenko

Diagnosis

This happened when A.K. Skvortsov was the Head of the USSR Flora Department and I was still very young. I stormed into his office and started complaining about a co-worker denounced as a thief. I demanded that he be given a fair punishment. While I was furiously shouting, my eyes bulging, brandishing my arms, and all that, AK just looked down with a calm smile. Upon giving me some time to vent, he finally said:

“And do you know what happens to all those crusaders for fair treatment? They eventually become paranoid.”

Swimsuit

In the 80's we were on a field trip in the Volgograd region with Dr. Skvortsov. It was extremely warm there, so everyone went with minimal clothes. As for me, I would just run around in my swimsuit all day long. We came back from the field trip. I reported to work the next day and was inside a small structure where we changed and spent our lunch breaks. As the

heat continued there, too, I was again in my swimsuit. Alexey Konstantinovich knocked, entered, saw me, and promptly ran outside in embarrassment. Yet in just a minute he briskly marched back in, waved his hand and said:

“Oh, yeah, right, I've seen you like that before.”

Translation by Irina Kadis