

## LIFE AFTER MARRIAGE

Now I am going to write about our married life and about the Bekkers. I loved them all and appreciated their wonderful qualities.

18 days after our wedding Mark had to leave for 2 months of military training. In succeeding years this kind of training took place every summer before the war. Right after the wedding, however, it was very difficult for us to part. Mark tried to get leaves as often as possible, and from time to time he escaped without permission just to be with me. He'd come home in military uniform and in military boots. He was not allowed to change to civil clothes. But I did not care. «Aren't you ashamed to go out with him dressed like that?» Mama would ask. Deeply hurt, I would answer: «Mama, he is my husband, and I am not ashamed of him no matter how he looks.»

In the first years of our married life Mama disliked Mark, even though he was very good with everyone. She did not like him because of his height. She always preferred tall men. Mark had a very unusual personality. Mama used to say: «Mark looks at everything through pink glasses, and money flows through his fingers like water». And this was true. He always was and is an optimist and a generous man, even though with age his judgment of people grew more demanding. As for money matter, in my young years I often reproved him for overspending. «If I become stingier, this will bounce back on you in the first place», he answered. And he was right.

I was in charge of our household: I could do what I wanted and spend whatever I desired. I did not even have to consult my husband in these matters, but I always did anyway. I used to tell him what I wanted to buy, and his response was always the same: «If you want it – you should have it!» Since I was the one taking care of the budget, it was easier for me to decide what we could and could not afford.

Sometimes I kept myself from buying things I desired, and Mark, seeing that I really wanted it, would find ways to indulge me. Mama kept teaching me: «A wife has to save money behind her husband's back.» But this wisdom was good for old times, when husbands kept their wives on daily allowances for household expenses. In my family it was different, and I did not need to hide anything from Mark. I was the one who kept track of the budget and tried to save money. Sometimes Mark would buy stuff for that house and, just to please me, say that he spent less money than he truly did.

In general, Mark was very generous with everyone. I used to say: «Had I been like you, you'd have lost both pants and underpants!» I always tried to make it nice at our place, even at times when

we were far from prosperous. At times it was better, at times – worse. But we always could make our guests happy.

The first year of our life together was difficult, not because we could not get used to each other, but because we lived under one roof with my parents. Had we lived with someone else, it would have been the same. Now I know that every married couple, young or old, has to have a place of their own. Co-habitation with other couples is not good for marital agreement. In America all families live separately, and this is how it should be. Only in the Soviet Union they could allow the barbarity of making families live in communal apartments. Different generations had to live together in one room. Take a family of two parents and two children. Children grow up, marry and produce their own offspring – and everyone remains in the same old room until grandchildren, in their turn, grow up. In spite of huge scale of residential housing construction, it was very difficult to get a separate apartment in the Soviet Union. This is why I always say that nuclear families, and even singles, should have space for themselves, no matter how much money it requires.

Mark and I were young and spirited. From the very start we felt that our relationship was very powerful. The first year was the hardest, but we prevailed. I am convinced that our relationship survived thanks to Mark's optimism and flexibility, my endurance and our mutual feeling for each other.

For me it was even more difficult, because I was caught in the crossfire of my feelings for Mark and my feelings for my parents and primarily for my mother. My father never interfered. After our wedding my parents and my sister Valia left for our dacha in Borovichi. Mark and I had a house for ourselves. We could not cook and there were no cookbooks at that time. We made an attempt to cook by eye and memory as our mothers did. We laughed, and kept teasing each other, and we never gave way to irritation. Mark was once a member of a student observation team in a public canteen and therefore he claimed he could cook. This was, of course, nothing but words. He knew as little about cooking as I did. But we never made a tragedy out of it.

Soon after our wedding Mark resigned from his job and started looking for a new one. He found a place, but his wages were rather low. I was by then a 1<sup>st</sup> category industrial designer and my pay was higher than his. Still, there were no arguments about that between us. In our relationship finances were never important. No matter what each of us earned, we always treated each other with love and respect.

On his paydays Mark usually appeared on the doorstep with flowers, a cake and a bottle of perfume, eau-de-toilette, or the like. He looked so happy and content then, that I couldn't fail to share his joy. When Mama learned about this, she remarked: «It is very nice indeed! Does he also give you the rest of the money?» «No», I said, perplexed. «And how are you going to survive? On flowers and cakes?» I felt that she was right. Very delicately I conveyed to Mark that things should change. Then he started giving me all the money he earned, along with receipt, though the latter was not necessary. From day to day we grew closer, in spite of obstacles and difficulties. For example, we slept on a twin sofa in the dining room and could never stay completely alone. We wanted to feel like a real independent family, and this was impossible because of my parents' presence. But we loved each other and nothing could change this. My initial rational attitude to marriage was forgotten. Mark was so loving, tender, attentive and gentle that I simply had to respond in the same fashion.

For the sake of independence, we frequented one Jewish canteen on Nevsky Ave. Then Mark suggested moving to his mother's place on Lesnoi Prospect. That place, however, was already occupied by his two sisters and two brothers living in a two-room apartment. One of the brothers and his wife had to live in the corner draped by bedspreads.

Then there was an idea to look for jobs in the Far East. Finally, my parents agreed to trade their apartment for a bigger one, with a separate room for us. We started looking for a deal. Mark found a three-room apartment on Lesnoi Prospect., not far from his relatives. It was available because the mother of the family had died, leaving behind her husband and son from first marriage. This son was a musician. He worked downtown and had to go home late at night. He needed to live closer to work. Therefore, he agreed to exchange his apartment for our place in Kuznechnyi Lane.

Our old apartment was dark, cold and had a woodstove for heating. Even in the summer I had to sleep under the quilt and warm my feet under the pillow. This apartment's only advantage was its proximity to downtown. Apartment on Lesnoi was further away from city center, but every room had a separate entrance from hallway. It was steam-heated, sunny and even had a balcony. It was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. We barely convinced mama to go there: she was reluctant to move away from the center. As if all she did was walk on Nevsky Avenue! Then Mama learned that the other apartment owners wanted 1500 old

rubles extra – and she refused to even consider it. Back then it was a lot of money: approximately 3 months of my pay. We wanted a separate room, of course; so we decided to pay the required amount without telling Mom. And that we did. We told Mama that the owners agreed to exchange with no extra money. 9 months after our wedding we moved to the new apartment, into our own 16 square meter room.

We were dizzy with happiness. By that time we had acquired the necessary furniture for our room: curtains, drapes, rugs and other stuff. We renovated the entire apartment. My parents lived in a 16 sq m room with a balcony, and there was a 27 sq. m. dining room for Valia to sleep and study. She, of course, was not very happy to find herself far from the city center and from her boyfriends and girlfriends. Also, she had to go to a different school now. Still, our life immediately changed to the best. Each had one's own corner; there was no need to crowd in one spot and, naturally, relationships within the family improved. Short of quarrelling, Mark and I felt pressed before. Same may be said of our parents. And the reason was that two families, different in age, intellect and outlook, were forced to mix.

This conclusion supports my argument that every couple should live separately.

Once in our own «nest», we started improving and embellishing it. Every weekend we wandered around antique shops picking up whatever we liked. Sometimes we were short of money, but if we saw something we liked, we borrowed short-term from my mother. Mark was a handyman, and every little thing he fixed gave him great pleasure. By the modest standards of those days, our room soon became a rather pleasant place to live.

All relatives and friends gladly visited us. We always had food and drink for guests. Besides, we enjoyed our own loving and tender relationship. Mark and I were very happy, healthy, young — and our life was ahead of us.

Once we moved to Lesnoi, I started working for the telephone factory «The Red dawn». I was a designer at the First Technologist's office. This workplace was closer to home and I didn't have to waste a lot of time for commute.

Mark also found a more interesting and better paid job. At that moment I noticed an inconstancy in him which was the direct opposite to my own character. Literally every 3-4 months he changed jobs saying that he gets bored when he learns everything about the job. In the Soviet Union this tendency was disproved. People like him were called «Flyers». Eventually, I succeeded in changing Mark's attitude.

That's what I used to tell him: «If you are so easily bored by your job – how do you imagine living with one and only wife? Maybe you'll get bored of me soon – Will you have to switch to someone else then?»

As our life together has shown, he remained true and faithful to everything related to me: his feelings, our relationship, and habits formed in youth. All this stayed with us for life. Myself, I am a conservative by nature: I do not like to change work, friends, habits; I detest moving from place to place, changing furniture etc. There were episodes in our life, however, when we had to change everything, including towns and countries of habitation. It is hard for me to make my mind – but once I do, I start acting calmly and systematically, without jitters. Besides, I have good intuition which saved our lives more than once.

Though not a believer, I always thought that sometimes it was God who helped me to make the right steps. The very first of those steps was to marry Mark. As I said earlier, I rather «intuited» him than loved him at first. Later in my narrative I will describe two more occasions of that kind.

Before the war the Soviet Union was short of power energy, and construction of new power stations did not seem to help. In order to save electric power, different organizations gave their employees leave on different days of the week. If a family happened to have a few working members, they had to rest on different days. In our small family I had a free day on Wednesday and Mark – on Saturday. We could never plan our weekends as people do today.

On his free day Mark met me after work. He always kissed me when we met or parted; when we were saying «good morning» or «good night»; after the meals and on other occasions. We were very fond of kissing – and we still are now. We both simply like it. After 46 years of life together, Mark still kisses my shoulder when he buttons up my bra (after the surgery for breast cancer it has become difficult for me to do) – and I thank him, both for his help and for his kiss that gives me pleasure. It also proves that in our advanced age we are not strange to sexual pleasures. We still have feelings; we are alive and passionate – and we like it.

During the first year of our married life friends and relatives came to visit us on the 29<sup>th</sup> of each month – to celebrate another month of our life together. Every time we had as much fun as if it were the wedding. Once Mark and I went to a restaurant because we wanted to be alone – but guests still arrived, and my parents enter-

tained them. Valia was 14. Everything that concerned us and our life used to evoke her interest. Besides, she became very attached to Mark. He replaced me as her supreme authority in many subjects. He helped her out with her studies. Her girlfriends from school were also interested in our life. At the very beginning of our life together I told Mark that I did not want children. «Ever – or just yet?» he asked. «Just yet.» Then Mark did everything to keep me from getting pregnant. He took very good care of my health during our entire lives. As for me, I did not want children at first because we hadn't known each other for long before the wedding and it was not clear for me whether we'd be able to stay together. As a reasonable girl who always thought ahead, I decided that first we need to spend some time together making sure that our family is stable and a future child will not suffer from parents' separation.

People, however, always expect a young couple to produce the first child a year after the marriage, and many of our acquaintances wondered why we had none. One Sergey Achik, a friend of the Bekkers, made a joke out of it. «Do you need help, Mark?» he used to say. The real joke, however, was that Sergey himself could not have children with his first wife Sonia. Because of this he divorced her after the war and married Nina, a widow of his brother. His brother was killed in the war and she was left with a boy child. Nina gave birth to Sergey's baby girl Alla.

Thus, we did not have to take care of children – and we worked a lot. Mark brought me extra designer work from his technology department where he was head of staff. I did this extra work nightly and earned extra money. We needed all we could earn to furnish our room and to buy extra clothes for Mark who had nothing but two nice suits. We bought him a good winter coat with a sealskin collar, a sealskin winter hat, an overcoat and many other necessary items. As for me, I had a decent wardrobe and in the first 3 years of our married life we bought nothing for me. I had a different problem, however. Soon after the wedding I started adding weight and most of my attires became too tight for me. Then we bought – or rather «acquired» from different sources – four dress length pieces of very handsome fabric, and a nice seamstress, former resident of Riga, made four very beautiful gowns for me.

In the first three years of married life I added 13 kg. I became plump like a dumpling and very sturdy: pinching me was tough. We enjoyed life and each other. In 1939 and 1940 we went for summer vacations to the Caucasus and the Crimea. We took pleasure in life.

Mark's relatives liked me very much and called me tenderly – «Sarrochka».

While we still lived in Kuznechnyi Lane, I made it a rule to visit Mark's mother every Sunday. Mark's brothers and sisters also used to come. Mama Bekker made all the cooking with the help of Tsilya, a young orphaned girl, her distant relative who lived with them for many years and was in charge of household. Right before the war Mama Bekker married her off to an older man and she moved in with him. We even visited them once.

## MARK'S PARENTS

Whether because I was her first Jewish daughter-in-law or simply because she liked me, but Mama Bekker always lavished me in tender attention. Of all her children only Senya and Liuba were married then. After 10 years of life together they finally decided to register their union after our wedding. They had no children. Sasha and Valia became a couple a year before our marriage. In September 1937 Valia gave birth to their first son George and then they registered their marriage and received a birth certificate for the baby.

The dinner at Mama Bekker's was usually followed by tea drinking. Once I refused to drink tea. Mama asked why, and I responded that I only drink sweetened tea in the morning and tea with a candy at night. Mama Bekker went to the other room, took a candy from under a stack of lingerie and gave it to me. After this incident she always had a candy for me.

Not long before the wedding I purchased a mole coat on credit. In the winter we came to visit Mama Bekker. Seeing the coat, she went to the other room, brought out several mole hides and gave them to me. With those I could make myself a fashionable hat and a muff. I thanked Mama, and her other daughter-in-law Valia asked: «Mama, why don't I get mole hides from you?» – «Get yourself this kind of coat – and I'll give you hides for a hat and a muff!» Mama responded without hesitation.

When I visited Mama Bekker I always kissed her and all brothers and sisters, saying hello and good-bye. They came to like it, and it became a customary mode of conduct in our family.

Soon after Mark and I got married, Mama Bekker met an aged man called Abraham Samoilovich – and she decided to marry him. It was the end of 1937. Six years passed since the death of her first husband who was the father of all 10 children and who died of liver cancer. Before taking this decisive step, Mama Bekker discussed it not only with her children, but with daughters-in-law also. Her two youngest daughters, Olia and Raia, were still maidens and lived with her. Two sons – Aroscha and Leva – were not married. And still, everyone's opinion was that it would be best for Mama to get married.

Arkadiy, her first son, came to this council from Moscow, and he said: «Each of you has his or her own private life, your own families. Mama gets lonely. Let her better have a friend and a husband by her side.» The matter was thus settled. Abraham Samoilovich moved in with Mama. They lived in one room, and all children – in the other room. Those were: Raia, Olia, Aaron and later – Senya and Liuba



who lived in a corner behind the drapes. Previously they rented a room on the same floor. Then the owner's daughter got married and laid claim to this room. This is why Senya and Liuba moved in with Mama. In the Soviet Union apartments for rent or purchase were extremely hard to find. Available apartments were terribly overcrowded. Several families often had to live in one room.

When they met, Abraham Samoilovich was still working. He had reached the age of retirement, but Soviet retirement pensions were too small to provide even for nothing but food. Those who could not produce a confirmation that they had worked the required number of years got nothing at all. Naturally, Mama Bekker never worked: she had to bring up 10 children. Soon Abraham Samoilovich stopped working, too. It was ruled that his and Mama's children would support them with monthly financial contributions. Every month on my payday I used to drop by Mama's place to give her 50 rubles. My monthly pay was 425 old rubles.

I believe, Abraham Samoilovich had 2 daughters and 2 sons. All of his siblings had spouses and their own children. They treated mama Bekker very well. They often visited their father and, apparently, they enjoyed each other's company. Mama was a nice, kind woman who knew how to get on with everyone around her, not speaking of her children, daughters- and sons-in-law. Everyone praised her and respected her. And her children, in our friends' words, «put her on a pedestal».

I think it was a great art of hers to get on with seven daughters-in-law and three sons-in-law; to earn their lifelong respect and sincere love. I have always held her in great esteem, and I have preserved all her words and actions in my heart and mind since my young years. I wished to be as good mother-in-law to my future children's spouses as Mama Bekker was to me. Part of my yearning to have both a son and a daughter certainly grew from the desire to try those roles on. In my whole life I had only one moment of misunderstanding with Mama Bekker, and it is printed in my memory forever.

This happened a year after our marriage. We lived on Lesnoi Prospect right next to Mama Bekker's place. Our buildings shared a courtyard. In May 1938 Olia, Mark's middle sister, was to marry Misha Bogorad who lived with his parents in the suburb of Pavlovsk. The wedding was about to be held in Pavlovsk. For some reason, however, Mama Bekker did not invite my parents. According to her own explanations, she was ashamed to invite them because Bogorads were too common a family. The real reason, I think, was that my own

mother somehow did not like Mama Bekker. She kept teasing the latter and mocking her. This I did not like because Mark and I lived very happily, and Mark treated my parents very well. And, in general, Mama Bekker did not deserve such attitude.

And still, they were my parents, and I disliked the fact that Mama Bekker had ignored them. I told Mark that I was not going to this wedding: he should go alone. He said that he could not go alone; that we had to go together; that it was his sister's wedding, and so on. We kept arguing until the last moment and finally did go together. We took the latest suburban train. I was hurt and I was not in the mood for celebration. At the wedding I never even approached the table and never joined the feast.

Since that day I stopped visiting Mama Bekker, even though we lived in the same courtyard. One day we were free from work and stayed home alone with Mark. My parents were somewhere out. Suddenly someone rang the door. This was Mark's mother. She entered, kissed me and said in Yiddish: «When a cat steals sour cream, its owner throws it out, but the cat returns. Mother acts in the same way. Children may throw her out, and she may be mad – but in a while she'll come back to them.» In Yiddish it is a very powerful saying and it made a big impression on me. Since then Mama Bekker and I remained good friends until her very death. I loved her and cared for her – and she paid me back.

It is time to say a few words about Mark's family. I will start with his parents. Mark's mother, Genya Moiseevna Bekker, born Gitel Birman in 1879. Her father was a carpenter. They lived in Odessa, in Moldavanka area, on Kastetsky Street.

She had a big brother called Abraham. He received some education and, while still a student, joined a revolutionary movement. He met his future wife Ghusta in student circles. They were both members of the Jewish National Committee (BUND) where they were in charge of education and propaganda among poor Jewish masses. They had two children, son Musia and daughter Lisa. They lived with the Birman's (Mama's parents) in the communal apartment where Father Birman had two small rooms and ran his carpentry shop. Mark's grandmother Raizel took care of grandchildren and of the house. Mama Bekker's youngest daughter – Raia – was named after her.

Mark's grandparents were tall and blonde. They were kind and gentle by nature, and always provided money and spiritual support to everyone who asked for it. They were very religious Orthodox Jews. They died in 1918 during the epidemic of typhoid fever. Ghusta, who

tended to them, contracted the disease and also died. Abraham could not accept the death of his parents and his beloved wife and decided to go after them. He stopped taking meals and died 13 days later. His body had been previously weakened by TB. Two small children lived first with Ghusta's parents and later moved in with Mama Bekker and her family. At 12 Lisa died of pneumonia. As for Musia, Mama Bekker took care of him and guarded him all her life.

Mama was a beautiful blonde girl. Unfortunately, she was not educated. She could not read and write in Russian, though she could read and write a little in Yiddish. Her spoken Russian was very poor. In her speech she mixed both languages, saying 2 words in Yiddish and 3 words in Russian. In 1903 she married Joseph-Rafael Berk-Berl Bekker. His Russian name was Iosif Berkovich and his Odessa nickname was Iosl der Berdichever. The origins of this nickname are unknown. He was born in 1877 to the family of Berk-Berl Bekker, a tailor. They lived with father's sister's daughter and son – Esther and Meyer. All three siblings were somewhat educated. This allowed Esther and Meyer to become schoolteachers. In addition, Meyer edited a Jewish newspaper. Papa was also educated and literate both in Yiddish and in Russian, but he was drawn to learning the art of cloth design and trading business. The entire family was very religious, including Papa.

Grandparents lived in downtown Odessa, in # 49 on Pushkinskaia Street. Their trimmings shop occupied the front part of the apartment. Grandparents were medium-height people, dark-haired, very companionable and kind. They passed those qualities to Mark's father. Grandmother grew up in an Orthodox family. Strong-willed and business-oriented, she was in charge of everything in the house. She was literate and spoke both Yiddish and Russian. Grandfather died during hunger after the revolution. Grandmother maintained her trimmings shop until very late in her life. Many goods she sold she made with her own hands.

Mark's parents – especially his father – were very religious. Mark's father was a good-natured man who believed in the goodness of humankind. He loved his wife and treated her with love and respect. Every day he gave her money to spend as she desired. Mark's father believed that one should have as many children as God wishes, and that contraceptives should not be used. In the first 15 years of their marriage Mama Bekker gave birth to 11 children. One boy died in infancy. Eight boys were born one after another. Naturally, their parents wanted a girl. Their ninth child was a girl. Three years later

the second girl was born, and then the third. When I was still young, I once asked Mama: «How come you did not try to protect yourself from new pregnancies» Under Soviet conditions providing for so many kids seemed unimaginable. «My husband did not like kissing a gloved hand», she said jokingly.

Mark's father provided for the entire family, gave money to charity and gave donations to the synagogue. He operated part of a booth at the flea-market. There he kept and from there he sold men's apparel. He ordered popular cloth lines from certain tailors who were his trade and business partners. He gave then money to purchase the materials in his mother's trimmings shop. This is how it worked before the revolution. After the revolution the flea-market closed and Papa Bekker started buying old garments, repairing, coloring and refashioning them in order to sell into private hands. His goods were stored in one of the nearest private shops. The shop's owner had to have a special government-issued license that allowed him to sell handicraft items. Most of such licensed artisans were disabled war veterans. Other people used their trading premises for their own purposes and paid off the veterans for that. This way it was possible to hide from Soviet financial inspectors. At least, this is how it worked in the first post-revolutionary years. The country's economy was devastated by the civil war. The bulk of consumer goods on the market dwindled. Soviet state attempted to boost state-controlled and coop-based economy, but it did not work very well. Scarcity of essential goods allowed «free entrepreneurs» to purchase them wholesale and to sell them retail with a huge profit in places where demand was even higher. This activity was illegal, of course. But this was how artisans survived. Most of them were Jews, and Papa was one of them. He had to support a huge family and this was the only trade he knew. Besides, artisans like him could no longer practice their workmanship because there were no tools or supplies.

New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1922, gave a huge boost to the development of private enterprise in big cities. Papa left his family in Odessa and himself went to Moscow. There he opened a handicraft sewing shop in the village of Alekseevka (Moscow Area). He established contacts with local tailors and started making ready-made men's clothes. He rented a small part of a warehouse on Trubnaia Street in Moscow, struck a deal with a disabled licensed artisan and started selling produce under his name.

Mark's parents were not wealthy, but they were thrifty. According to Mama, every activity in her house was rationed and regulated. In the

morning all children had to sit down to breakfast. The youngest ones were tied to their chairs with towels. Breakfast consisted of sweet tea and *saikas* – buns with butter. Older children had 2 glasses of tea with a fixed amount of sugar; middle children had a glass and a half; small ones – one glass. For dinner they most frequently had cutlets (Russian meatballs with bread), for it allowed Mama to save on meat. Their regular first course was bean soup. Beans were also offered on the side for the entree. All children loved those dishes.

At the start of our life together Mark enjoyed eating only a few things, such as bean soup, bullion or borsch, cutlets, steak and –surely – gefelte fish. Their family lived in Odessa, that is, in Ukraine, where vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables were plentiful. Mama Bekker, however, did not understand about vitamins. Seeing how we were trying to stuff our kids with vitamins, she would laugh and say: «All I hear from you is «vitamins-shmitamins»! What is it about them? When my kids were small, I used to go to Privoz with a hand cart and I brought back tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers and other fruits and vegetables.» «Exactly!» I would say. «And those were the best sources of vitamins!» All her kids were sturdy and healthy. They were rarely sick because they lived by the sea, in the fresh air. Older children were swimming in the sea from early spring to late fall.

Before the revolution older boys – Arkadiy, Grisha and Senya – attended gymnasia. Mark, the fourth son, went only as far as middle preparatory grade. Younger children had to stay at home with Mama. They always had a nanny, and sometimes a housemaid. In 1916 their father was conscripted to Tsarist Army as a field soldier. His unit was stationed in the home front where they were waiting for the departure to the frontline, to the town of Berdichev. As Papa Bekker was very religious and could eat nothing but kosher food, he was granted leaves to the town to buy him food and to attend synagogue. During one of those leaves he contacted a local physician who for a certain reward agreed to diagnose Papa with a two-sided groin hernia.

A little later, when they were ready for departure, Papa approached medical experts with a record of his fake diagnosis. Medical doctors released him from military service. This happened in early 1917. While he was in the army, Mama received huge support pension for 8 children. Using this money plus her own savings, she opened a dairy store in their apartment on Bolshaia Arnautskaia, corner of Richelieu Street. On the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of this apartment there were 4 rooms and a kitchen. Parents and their youngest daughter Betia slept in one room, older boys – in the other one; younger boys – in

the third one, which also had a dinner table and served as a dining room. Housemaid slept in the kitchen or in the store. The store did not last long: the family ate more merchandise than sold.

In the spring of 1917 their father came home after a few months of absence. The dairy store was closed; furniture and non-essential stuff were sold and the entire family moved to a country house in Lustdorf. They gave up their apartment in order to save summer rent money. Their dacha was a 2-story house. Mark's family lived on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor where they had 4 rooms, a veranda and a kitchen.

*Memoirs written by Mark:*

*I remember little of my early childhood which coincided when the reign of Lenin and Stalin. We lived on Bolshaia Arnautskaia between Richelier and Yekaterininskaia Streets. Papa used to take me to the synagogue on Yekaterininskaia. When he was conscripted, Mama received financial support from the government and she opened a little store where she sold dairy products: milk, cottage cheese, sour cream and other things she purchased from peasants. The store was located in the room with a street entrance. our family lived in back rooms. Apart from the store and the synagogue I remember kheder. Papa used to take me there in the morning. When he left, I started commuting on my own.*

*Papa's parents and their son lived on Pushkinskaia Street between Uspenskaia and Bolshaia Arnautskaia. When Tsar Nicolas came to Odessa, Papa took us, older children, to Grandma's place to watch Tsar's cortege proceed from the railroad terminal to Pushkinskaia in the direction of Deribasovskaia. I also remember that in my childhood Papa regularly took me to men's public bathhouse on Meshchanskaia Street. I recall our visit to Mama's father who lived on Kastetsky Street in Moldavanka area.*

*Once I visited Papa at the Tolchok. There I saw him with a customer, persuading the man to buy clothes from him. The booth had no doors, people simply walked in. Suits were hanging on one side, coats and jackets – on the other, and trousers were lying on the shelf. Papa fitted a jacket on his customer, put trousers to the jacket and turned the man to face the mirror which was in the center of the booth. I did not see what happened next: I left, because it had been a long time since I left Mama, and I was afraid that Papa will punish me if he learns about my long absence.*

*I remember that in the summer of 1917 Papa rented a dacha in 10<sup>th</sup> Station area, in the suburbs. At the end of that summer, instead of returning to our old place where the dairy shop had been, we were sent to live with Aunt Esther, father's sister, and with Grandma.*

February revolution of 1917 disrupted the rhythm of normal life. Various warring parties appeared. Aided by workers and marines, Bolsheviks formed regular units of Red Army and fought to cease power in Odessa. Detachments of ghaidamaks (Ukrainian nationalists) fought against them. Also there was the authority of Temporary Government, supported by the police and by those military units where authoritative officers managed to maintain military discipline. Various gangs and thief cartels also flourished. The city was full of burglars and robbers. After a few episodes of anti-Semitic pogroms, Jewish population of Odessa organized national militia for self-defense.

By the end of September Mark's family moved back to the city. They rented an apartment on Belinsky Street, in the house by the brewery which had been smashed and vandalized by rioting crowds. The owner of the brewery managed to escape, but concierge stayed in the house, and for a handsome amount of money allowed the family to move in. They did not stay there long: one of the warring parties decided that the house would be good location for their headquarters. They moved Mark's family to the corner of Kanatnyi and Novorybnyi Streets into a large 6-room apartment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. There Mark's family stayed until 1923. Mark's father opened a small dye-house. At the same time he provided tailors with tools and materials to make clothes at home, then sold their produce himself or gave it to sell at the market. Proceeds from this business fed the entire family.

Arkadiy, Grisha, Senya and Mark continued studies in the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish Gymnasia of Odessa. It was difficult to work and study when the city constantly passed from one warring party to the other. Finally, in 1922 Soviet regime firmly established itself in Odessa and life gradually returned to normal. Arkadiy, Grisha and Senya took jobs to help feed the family, and Mark entered a Soviet labor school where students were fed, dressed and taught handicraft skills. They spent there all day, but they slept at home.

In the years that followed Soviet government was growing increasingly intolerant of private artisans. Therefore, Mark's father went to Moscow to earn money. Arkadiy and Senya soon followed him. Grisha exchanged letters with his friend Orzhik and escaped to Shanghai from Blagovescensk. First he tried to escape abroad from Odessa – by the sea route – but both his attempts failed.

## HOMAGE OF MY MOTHER-IN-LAW

*April 1, 1986 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Mama, Ghitel' Moiseevna. She was born in 1879, on the day of Simkhat-Torah holiday, and she always celebrated her birthday on that holiday. She died in her 83<sup>rd</sup> year on April 1, 1961, on the second day of Passover.*

*She died suddenly without pain or suffering, as truly pious people die. And pious she was.*

*Mama brought up 10 children: 7 sons and 3 daughters. Her husband, a religious Jewish man, died relatively young, 30 years before Mama. At the time of his death their youngest child was 11. Their family survived the First world war and the revolution of 1917. Life was not easy for them.*

*And still, in spite of all deprivations and hardships, in spite of the fact that she was completely illiterate, Mama managed to teach her children how to be kind, honest and decent; how to respect each other and their elders.*

*The author of these lines is her daughter-in-law, wife of her 4<sup>th</sup> son. All of us, her daughters and sons-in-law, used to call her «Mama». and she was like a real mother to us, even though physically she was not able to help any of her children. Still, we respected, cherished and loved her.*

*Her 5 sons and 2 sons-in-law fought the Nazis in the Second World War and were awarded for their military deeds.*

*Mama was extraordinarily smart, wise, kind and gentle. She was very easy to get on with, and she did a lot of good to everyone who needed her help. She called us, her daughters and sons-in-law, her children's «interest», and she added that «interest» was even dearer to her than «cash». Her Russian was very poor, and she mixed Yiddish words into her Russian speech.*

*She was religious, but she never created problems for her non-Jewish relatives: daughters-in-law and a son-in-law. She loved everyone and treated everyone equally well.*

*When her sons or daughters had episodes of discord in their families, she very gently and tactfully helped to smooth over contradictions, always taking the side of her children's spouses. I do not remember her conflicting with her children.*

*I've been married for 49 years and I am myself a grandmother – but I can talk about Mama for hours and I always use her strategies in relationships with my own offspring.*



*When Soviet officials decided to issue honorary awards to all women who had 10 children, Mama received the Star of Heroic Mother.*

*Our Mama lived to see 25 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild.*

*Now our family numbers over 100 persons, not including those who are already in a better world.*

*53 members of our family live in America; the rest are in the Soviet Union.*

*Mama died 25 years ago – and we still frequently recall her with love and warmth. We tell our children about her.*

*We all bow to her memory and express deep regret that we cannot visit her grave at the Jewish cemetery in Leningrad.*

*Her memory will stay with us for many years to come.*

*May her ashes rest in peace!*

# СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВО

*Детям, внукам, правнукам  
и праправнукам*

В ЗНАК  
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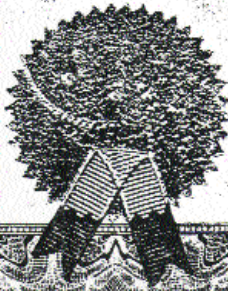
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1986

## ARKADIY AND HIS FAMILY

Mark's older brother Arkadiy (born 1904) moved to Leningrad and set to work at The Red Dawn telephone factory. After their father's death in 1933, the factory gave Arkadiy a two-room apartment on Lesnoi Prospect, in the Batenin residential area, not far from the factory itself. He moved his mother and younger siblings to that apartment.

For himself he rented a room at the Petrograd Side, but he rarely lived there, being an official representative of The Red Dawn supplies department in Moscow. The oldest son and brother, he was the favorite of the family: tall, perfectly built, with light hair, kind face and a charming smile. He helped everyone out and never screamed at anyone. Modest, polite, quiet, delicate and taciturn, he was very attractive to girls, but never tried to win someone's affection and love in order to create a family. At different times he had affairs with women, but they ended in nothing. One of his work connections was Boris Klebanov, an engineer who worked in Moscow for the ministry. Boris introduced Arkadiy to his sister, and in April 1937 they got married, very modestly, with no feast to mark this event. They came to Leningrad to our wedding. This was their honeymoon. Arkadiy was 33, Kettie, his wife, was the same age. She was shapely, had dark hair and brown eyes, spoke little, but had a nice voice and could sing pretty well. Her profession was artist-designer. All her life she worked at home painting dinner plates and saucers.

Before marriage Arkadiy lived in a hotel as a representative of the Leningrad-based factory. After marriage he and Kettie moved to 19 Stoleshnikov Lane, to the basement apartment. At that time her parents were still alive. Later they received a room in the adjacent house, 21 Petrovka Street. On April 2, 1938, their son was born. He was called Rafail after Arkadiy's father who had two first names: Joseph-Rafail. Arkadiy's patronymic was «Rafailovich», while the rest of the brothers were «Josephovichi».

The Bekker family treated Kettie well and with respect, but everyone knew that Arkadiy was not very happy with her. May her ashes rest in peace! – She was not a good housewife: she did not know how to keep the house properly, was untidy and careless. all his life Arkadiy suffered from it. Nothing interested her. They never entertained guests; never celebrated anniversaries and holidays. If Arkadiy wanted to buy something for the house, he tried to time it to the visit of one or the other of his relatives to Moscow in order to tell Kettie: «This is Mark's present»; «This is from Leva», etc. Otherwise

she would get mad at him and say that she needed nothing. When Arkadiy wanted to see someone, he invited them to a restaurant, and not to his house. This was an upsetting situation for him, but he was a decent man and did not want to divorce her. Besides, he loved his son very much.

There was an episode in their lives that made a very negative impression on me and on all the Bekkers. However, the Bekkers were delicate people and they never reproached her afterwards. It was like this: after the war of 1941-1945, Arkadiy got mixed up in a certain scheme at work, was sentenced to 5 years of prison and had to work all this time at a factory as nickel-platter. For him it was hard, unpleasant time. As for Kettie, she refused to see him during this time, never wrote to him and did not support him in a spiritual or material way. She never sent him food or clothes. This was the cruelest thing to do. Betia, Arkadiy's oldest sister, who lived in Moscow, did everything for him instead of his wife. She also brought his small son to see him. Everyone thought that Arkadiy will finally leave his wife when he gets out of prison. But he forgave Kettie and stayed with her until his death. After prison he worked at the same factory until he reached retirement age which was 55 for nickel-platters because this work was considered harmful for health. When he retired, he was still in good shape. He liked sports and accompanied his son to a skating-rink. At that time they lived in two rooms in a communal apartment. Kettie's father, who died a few days short of his centennial anniversary, lived in one room, and Arkadiy and his family – in the other one.

They bought a coop studio for Rafa, and he was very happy. After school he went to college where he majored in chemistry. After graduation he entered graduate school. He was a good and promising boy, and he was very good to his parents. By then they started ailing. Arkadiy had Parkinson's, and Kettie developed a benign tumor in sciatic area. As time went by, they were becoming less and less mobile and required more and more care. In the winter of 1966 Rafa married Galia, a lab assistant from his research institute. She was an orphan and had no relatives.

Mark and I came from Riga to their wedding. The majority of our Leningrad relatives also arrived. Arkadiy rented a hall in «Beijing» restaurant for the occasion. I was, however, surprised to see him in his casual suit and Kettie – in a skirt and a blouse.

A year later Galia gave birth to their son Pavlik. They all lived in Rafa's studio. Galia had one windowless room in a communal

apartment, but that building was scheduled for demolition and they could do nothing about exchanging these two residential spaces for one bigger apartment. It was difficult for 3 persons to live in one room. Kettie was not on good terms with Galia. She was very formal and dry with her. She could not forgive Galia for spending nights with Rafa before marriage. Characteristically, for Rafa's wedding, when Arkadiy wanted to add tasty homemade dishes to the restaurant menu, it was Betia and not his wife who he asked to cook gefelte fish, pierogis, goulash and other delicacies. This was one of the elements of his unhappy family life. Still, he respected Kettie and never voiced his dissatisfaction.

Rafa defended his Masters' thesis in chemistry. He was very modest. His parents' illness pressed him hard. He had to tear himself apart between his work, family and his parents who now required constant supervision. In 1977 he received a three-room apartment in a newly-built residential complex, and he transferred his parents there. He could no longer run back and forth between houses. His parents' old place was in dreadful condition: bed ticks, dirt everywhere, broken furniture, beds with broken springs – that's what it was like. Bed sheets were changed very rarely. At some point Arkadiy stopped lying down at night: he slumbered, fully dressed, on an old sofa until dawn, unwashed and unshaven. This is why Rafa took his parents to his new apartment against Galia's obvious discontent. Rafa used to say: «I cannot stand all this. I will be dead ahead of my parents.»

Then he took a sabbatical to write his doctoral thesis. In early August of 1978 we made our final visit to Moscow before departure to America. We dropped by Rafa's place to say good-bye to Arkadiy and Kettie. Both were sitting in a clean room with two well-made beds, but they were pale and white-haired, as if marked by death. Soon after our departure, in September, Kettie died. Arkadiy survived her by a few months. As far as I remember, he died in February 1979. They were not too old – just 75, but they were both senile. Death released them from senseless, joyless lives. and Rafa – from a heavy burden.

Rafa could have lived and enjoyed his family – but fates ruled otherwise. And a cruel ruling that was! At the beginning of this month, in September 1983, a letter from Moscow informed us that Rafa was buried on August 25<sup>th</sup>. I cannot help crying as I am writing these lines, because Rafa was one of my favorite nephews and he was too young to die. He went to the South, to Sukhumi, with his wife and son, a boy of 15, for vacation. I do not know what exactly

happened, but on the road he developed high fever and in two days he was dead. The body was taken by air to Moscow where they did autopsy and found brain hemorrhage. His open coffin was placed in the conference-hall of the research institute where he had worked for 22 years. There he defended his Masters' and Doctoral theses; there he published over a hundred works. Colleagues loved and respected him.

I feel deep sympathy for Galia and Pavlik, not speaking of Rafa himself. My son Jos wept like a child when he learned about this death – and he is a very reserved man. He hasn't shed tears since the age of 3. Innochka also took it very close to her heart. Rafa was their favorite cousin. Jos was particularly involved with him – both on professional grounds and spiritually. Without consulting each other, both my children suggested that we help Rafa's spouse and child in every possible way, including money, – if they accept this gesture, of course. They loved him very much – and he loved them back. He used to say that Innochka was his favorite sister. He was brave enough to see her off to the airport. And then he did the same for Jos; and then for us, his aunt and uncle.

When Rafa was 13 and 14, Arkadiy brought him for two summers to our dacha on Riga Sea coast. There we came to know and love the boy. He was always polite, obedient; he never harried anyone and invariably followed our domestic rules. Innochka was 3 years, and Jos – seven and a half years younger than Rafa. And still, he treated them as equals.

I recall one episode. Our children slept after dinner. I offered Rafa to go and rest too. He said that he had never before slept during the day – but he did lie down, and followed that rule every day. Sometimes he'd fall asleep. Once children asked for a permission to go to the cinema after they have their after-dinner nap. I agreed to let them go. Innochka then got overexcited and could not sleep. When Josik and Rafa woke up, I told them that they could go, but that Innochka was punished and would stay home. Then Rafa said that they will stay too. He was so young – and already able to refuse himself pleasure for the sake of the other person! I memorized this episode for life. We all grieve about his death. He was still young and strong; had such a kind and good heart. What was he punished for? How unfair! Innochka called Uncle Senya's place in Moscow and expressed condolences from all of us Bekkers to Rafa's spouse and son, and to all our relatives in Leningrad. What a sad end for the son of our favorite big brother Arkadiy!

But there is nothing we can do against fate.



**Arkadiy and Mark. Moscow.**



**Arkadiy with wife Kettie and brother Senya. Moscow.**



**Arkadiy's son Rafail with wife Galia and cousin Zhora. Moscow.**



**Arkadiy's son Rafail with wife Galia and grandfather Klebanov.  
Moscow.**





**Arkadiy's grandson – Rafail's son Pavel with mother Galia.  
Moscow.**



**Arkadiy's grandson, Rafail's son – Pavel Bekker, and Betty's  
daughter Ira meeting Joyce Rifkind and Inna Bakker in Moscow,  
2002.**

## GEORGE AND HIS FAMILY

The second Bekker brother – Grisha, or George – was born in 1905. I always say that all Bekker brothers are smart, but Grisha is the smartest of all. He saw through the Soviet power while still a youngster, soon after the revolution. When gymnasiums closed, he became a handyman. He painted street poles and did many other things. While working, he joined a drama studio organized on the premises of a cinema factory. his lifelong dream was to be an actor. Grisha initiated letter exchange with his friend whose family name was Orzhik. After the revolution Orzhik emigrated to Shanghai, China. Grisha started thinking about Shanghai too. Twice he and Senya attempted to run away by sea, but both their attempts failed. Then Grisha decided to go by land. He took a train to Blagovescensk in Siberia and in winter walked across the frozen Amour river to the Chinese side. In Shanghai he became an assistant worker at the food store.

The year was 1923. Work was hard and he had to work long hours. He slept in the store under the counter. Brought up in a big family, he was suffering from loneliness. Later he said that at times in Shanghai he had thought about going back home to the Soviet Union. Fortunately, he was smart enough to reject this idea, otherwise his life would have ended in one of Siberian prison camps.

Several years passed, and Grisha decided to move o to America. His savings proved barely enough to buy a first-class ticket to a steamboat. He decided to travel first-class in order to make his name known in business circles. Back then lists of first-class passengers were published in newspapers and everyone assumed that they were rich business people. In San Francisco he became a salesman in a food store. This line of work was familiar to him from China. He revealed great talent for commerce and soon became first co-owner, and then the owner of the store. He still lived very modestly trying to save money on everything – as, by the way, all Americans do.

First thing in America he learned the English language because without the language he could not work. Then Grisha – or George as he started calling himself – went to college to study real estate business. He was a smart guy and he succeeded in this career. Then he married an American girl whose parents were also immigrants from Russia. I think, this happened in 1936 when George was already 31. First he earned himself a fortune, and then created a family.

His wife bore him 4 children. Joyce was born in 1939, Ed – in 1941, Dan – in 1945, and the youngest daughter Beverly – in 1949.

They had a nice, big, wealthy family. All children studied at universities. Oldest daughter Joyce majored in political science and in 1959 she married a pharmacist. they opened their own pharmacy, and it proved profitable enough to provide for the family. They have 2 kids: son Lenny and daughter Julie. Lenny is a college student and Julie is still at high school. All George's children are college graduates; all are fairly well to do, but they live very modestly, never boast about their wealth and never squander their money. They even try to save on certain things.

Ed – George's second child – married Snooke. They also have 2 kids. Two years ago he made a very posh *bar-mitzvah* for his son Aaron. His daughter is now 12.

Dan, George's second son, met his future wife Sharron at the university. They were friends and lovers for 10 years without registering their union. Finally, George told his son that he could not rob the girl of her youth like that: he needed to either marry her or part with her. Then they got married. They decided that they did not want any children. Sharron was a very successful programming consultant. However, by the age of 37 (they are the same age) they changed their minds and in 1981 Hannah was born. Needless to say, her parents adore her.

When George's little daughter Beverly was 11, he divorced his first wife after more than 25 years of life together. He told us that she had wearied him by her mental instability, constant nagging and teasing. He had hoped that motherhood would soften her, but this did not happen. Hence – the divorce.

One other circumstance may have played the role in this event. While playing poker at his club, George met a lady called Elaine. He married her soon after his divorce was completed. She was a widow of a diplomat and had 3 adult independent daughters. George's 3 older children also lived by themselves. All property was divided between the spouses according to the American law. During the trial, Beverly expressed the wish to live with her father, but Elaine was against it. Beverly was sent to a boarding school and then to a foster family – a childless couple who were paid for taking care of her. The girl was not taking it well, and finally her sister Joyce took her in. Beverly was the one who suffered the most from the divorce. In 2 years George's first wife died of brain cancer, and part of her estate was divided between 4 children. Beverly was yet a minor and received nothing but monthly interest from her inheritance for pocket expenses. She could not exercise her rights over her inheritance until the age of 30 or 32 – that

is, until she would supposedly be married.

This was arranged to prevent her young suitors from marrying her for her money. Beverly married a Christian American who taught handicraft skills at school.

Ten years passed, and Beverly understood that she and her husband had little in common. She decided to divorce him. Now they are in the process of divorce. John claims his rights to a part of their house saying that he invested a lot of work in it. The house, however, was purchased for Beverly's money.

Beverly has changed a lot recently. She appears less tense, looks much prettier; dresses better than before; started using cosmetics. She has many interesting suitors.

At 33 she is in her prime. One of her suitors is a Jewish physician, a very interesting man. He has never been married. Lord grant them happiness!

All George's kids are very nice, friendly and amiable. They met us, their Russian relatives, only a few years ago. This was George's decision, and he was right. We asked George why he kept us away from his children, and he'd answer: «You'll meet them in due time». Once we became more sure of ourselves in the new country, George's son Dan and his wife came to New York to meet us.

By then we all spoke some English. Their impression of us was as good as it could get. They liked us all. Back in California they shared their impressions with brothers and sisters who also expressed the desire to come and see us. Over the years all of them visited New York to our mutual pleasure. They stay in touch with Innochka more than with anyone else because they share common themes and opinions with her. She wants to know America as well as possible and she likes America and Americans.

As for George, he became a real American without losing the best of his family qualities. He is very kind and delicate. Children love and respect him. He never stopped helping his mother, and when she died, George started helping out his siblings by sending a package with presents to each of them once a year. Innochka already lived in America when he told her that he regarded his plight to help his family as a God-sent duty. After all, of all brothers he was the only one who managed to escape from the Soviet Union. Maybe this is why he ended up more successful than others.

Here in America, he did not have to fear NKVD or OBKHSS (Society for the Prevention of Socialist Property Misappropriation), because private enterprise here is part of normal life. In 1959 George

first came to the Soviet Union as a tourist. He had not seen his mother for 34 years. Fortunately, she was still alive and happy to see him. At first he was afraid to go. Everyone kept telling him scary stories about visitors lured into traps. Therefore, he brought a friend, a representative or even the owner of a travel agency who had to sign tour contracts with corresponding Soviet organizations. George told us that even the President of the US was informed about his trip. Had something bad happened to him – the President would have taken measures. Thanks God, everything went smoothly.

The kind of a reception we organized for George he could have had nowhere else, but in Russia.

In his travel papers George wrote that he had a blood sister – Betty Dvorkina – who lived in Moscow. Betia was invited to KGB for an inquiry and she was asked whether she wanted to see her brother. She answered «yes», of course. Then a letter from George arrived. He named the date of his arrival and added that we did not need to meet him. He would call himself when he checked into hotel. All brothers and sisters came to Moscow and assembled in Betia's small apartment on Gorky Street near the Central Telegraph Office. Everyone wanted to see George, but we had no idea where and at what time he would appear. We were calling different places, made a few trips to railroad terminals where trains from abroad were expected: all in vain. I came to Moscow with Mark and Josik who was then 14. Innochka stayed in Riga: she was preparing for her entrance exams to medical school. Mark decided to book us into a hotel: at Betia's it was too crowded. It is a common knowledge that Soviet hotels never have vacancies for the public: all rooms go to important persons or to those who are smart enough to bribe senior employees. Mark was standing in a line when they announced that the hotel was full. Suddenly he heard a familiar voice. He looked back: there was a man of medium height with light hair, dressed in an old cardigan and a straw hat, in his face Mark saw something so dear and familiar that he could not help asking: «Grisha, is that you». And they fell in each other's embrace.

When Grisha got a room, Mark was given one, too. While hotel employees were filling out the papers, Mark called Betia to say that they met and that Grisha wants everyone to come see him to the hotel. We went there – and had a wonderful time. After 34 years of absence Grisha recognized all his siblings and immediately memorized faces and names of all their spouses and children. Seeing him for the first time in my life was like meeting an old friend, while his siblings felt like they and Grisha had never parted.

He spent a few days in Moscow and then we flew to Leningrad to see Mama: all in one airplane. At the airport restaurant where we went for breakfast, the Bekker family took up the entire long party table in the center of the dining hall. Grisha wanted to pay for everyone in dollars, but it proved so expensive that we decided to pay ourselves and in rubles. Grisha took a room in «Astoria». He and his friend were given two cars to use as they wished. We loaded into those cars and drove off to the suburbs, to Lysii Nos Station to Leva's dacha where Mama was visiting that summer. The reunion of mother and son was very tender and touching – but there were no exclamations or weeping. Mama Bekker was a reserved woman.

The entire Bekker family assembled there. That was a great moment. I always say that every family reunion makes me ten years younger.

Dinner was served on a spacious veranda where a beautifully decorated table was prepared. Grisha and his friend were so astonished by the abundance and variety of delicacies spread on that table that they started making pictures. Then everyone settled down and the feast began.

Course changes were coming all the time. Leva's late wife Valia was a good cook. Her father, who was also visiting there, used to be a dessert chef at the best restaurants, so he made a strawberry tart from strawberries grown right there, in the garden. The tart was so huge, it took half the table – and it was extraordinarily beautiful. It was also photographed.

Grisha's behavior was very simple and modest. He then was already a very wealthy man, but he did not boast and said little about himself. He just answered the questions of curious relatives. He said that he had a construction business and that he builds small and large houses for sale and rent. He himself has a house in the suburbs. Asked about the number of rooms in his house, he counted up to 12 and got confused. As for food, he said that they had a storage room where hundreds of canned foods were preserved.

His wife is a passionate card player. She plays with her lady friends and comes home half an hour before dinner – that is, before Grisha's arrival. She opens a few cans, warms them up – and the dinner is ready. Grisha pays one of his sons a dollar for washing the dishes in a dishwasher. I believe, they also had a cleaning lady who cleaned their house.

That summer his daughter Joyce was getting married and they hired caterers to prepare for the wedding. No member of his family wanted to steam in the kitchen.

Grisha was happy about his first visit to the Soviet Union, and since then he kept coming every 2-3 years. At times he'd come to Moscow, at times to Leningrad. He even visited Odessa, his native city. Every time he arrived, the entire family would come together for a big feast. Once he brought his first wife and two younger children – Dan and Beverly. They were 14 and 10 at that time, I believe. Later he informed us about his divorce. After that he came with his second wife Elaine – and brought her back a few times. His last visit fell on July of 1973. He came by ship.

George never talked about politics and never tried to persuade anyone to leave the Soviet Union. When asked why he never invites anyone to visit him, he'd say: «You live here and you are satisfied with your life. If you see how people live in America, you will lose your spirits».

Nevertheless, the wave of emigration roused up youngsters from our family. Initially everyone wanted to go to Israel. Klara's and Sasha's children – Misha with wife Bella and a child, and Ada with Tolya and a child – were the first to leave. They left from Leningrad and, instead of Israel, came to America. Grisha was not very happy, but as a delicate person, said nothing.

Grisha thinks that young people have to build their own lives. He remembers his difficult youth and knows that he earned his prosperity by hard labor. Still, he is very prudent and thrifty. For example, he buys everything on sales. He buys paperbacks because they are cheaper. When his son Ed teases him, he answers: «I grew up in a poor family and I am used to saving money, while you grew up in a rich family – that's why you can afford expensive books in hardcover».

I recall the other episode during one of his visits to the Soviet union Grisha asked us for a two-kopek coin to call from a telephone booth. No one had two kopeks, and Sasha gave him a ten-kopek coin which was the same size and could work just the same. Grisha was horrified: «How can you waste your money like this! It means that you are simply throwing away 8 kopeks!» He knew that his Soviet relatives laughed at his thriftiness. To Inna he said once: «Had I not been so thrifty, I wouldn't have earned this much money and I wouldn't be able to help you!»

Once Inna visited him the day before his departure from New York. The next day she took a taxi and went to the airport to see him off. When he learned that she paid 18 dollars for the taxi, he was horrified. «How can you be so careless! Just think you spent all this money just to see me for extra 15 minutes!» Inna was surprised: she'd thought he'd be happy and would praise her for her gesture. And

that's how Grisha is.

Generally, however, he is a wonderful person and our family cherishes and loves him. American relatives like Grisha are not easy to find. Torn away from his family for so many years, he never forgot it. He remembers everyone; always tries to help in need; wants to be in touch with everyone, whether in America or in the Soviet Union. And we wish him long life and health. A man of this kind deserves the best. God bless him!



**Grisha (George) with his children.**





**Grisha Bekker with his mother and Mark. 1959, Leningrad.**



**First visit of Grisha to see his mother and family after 34 years.  
1959, Leningrad, dacha of Lev Bekker.**



**First row left to right:  
Senya, Mark, Grisha,  
Arkadiy, Lev, Sasha,  
Olga, Kettie, Klara.  
Second row: Fira,  
Sofa, Joseph, Betty,  
Mila, Ira.**



**Lev, Mark, Sofa, Sasha,  
Olga, Marik, Joseph,  
Klara, Grisha, Senya.**



**Grisha Bekker with his wife Elaine visiting family in Russia from  
America every 2 years. First Row: Zhora, Sasha, Klara, Semen,  
Arkadiy, Aron, Sofa, Mark, Inna, Senya, Sergey, Raya, Marik, Lev,  
Bella. Second Row: Olga, Fira, Betty. Third row: Yana, Leva, Lena.**



**Senya, Aron,  
Grisha, Arkadiy,  
Lev. Russia**



**Inna talking about emigration with Grisha.**



**Leningrad. Summer, 1973.**



**Meeting at the airport.: Joyce, Gary, Inna, Ilya, Sofa, Mark.  
1980, New York**







**Joyce with Sofa and Mark. New York.**



**Inna's last photo with Grisha. 1994, San Diego.  
Beverly, Lauren, Shayna, Helen.**



**Grisha's children and grandchildren  
at the wedding of Jennie and Michael. November, 11 1998, Maui.  
Sharron, Joshua, Hanna, Jenny, Michael, Snookie, Ed, Aaron, Joyce,  
Mark, Gary, Inna, Elsie, Alex, Len, Jessica.**



## SENYA AND HIS FAMILY

Mark's third brother Senya was born on December 12, 1906. As a child he had a pleasant voice and his parents prophesied him a career of a synagogue cantor. He was the favorite grandson of his paternal grandmother. Revolution came and mixed up all plans. After 7 years of studies in gymnasias he had to forget about education. He was helping out his father out at the flea-market; he was learning about trade and commerce and, like all boys of his age, he was selling newspapers and trolley tickets to earn some pocket money. When his father moved to Leningrad, he followed him and started helping him there. In his boyhood Senya fell while riding on a trolley buffer and dislocated his leg. This trauma left a lifelong trace, so that during the war he was registered as unfit for front-line service. When he grew older, he went to study at economist courses. He was smart and inventive; he knew his way around mechanisms; he read a lot and was very knowledgeable. All these qualities have stayed with him until today.

In Moscow he rented a room by Briansky railroad terminal, from a Russian family. Apartment owners had a 16-year-old daughter named Liuba – a typical Russian girl with a round face and red cheeks. Senya was only 20 when he started an affair with her – and they lived together for 18 years. As I said earlier, his father, an Orthodox Jew, was very upset by this liaison. Senya was one of his favorites.

After graduation Senya worked for the glass factory located in Moscow area, where they made retorts for light bulbs and transported them to Svetlana factory in Leningrad. These two plants always argued about retorts breaking during transportation. Senya invented and built special containers to help reduce retort breakage on the train. He then traveled to Svetlana plant in Leningrad to witness the unloading of the train and to determine what percentage of losses could actually be attributed to the producers. New containers proved so effective, that the glass factory recovered its losses and Svetlana plant offered the inventor to work for them. Senya and Liuba moved to Leningrad, rented a room in the house on Lesnoi Prospect, where the rest of the family lived, and started working for Svetlana. There he revealed great inventor's gift and soon became very popular and respected.

This, however, did not improve his financial and residential situation. Svetlana kept promising him an apartment, but did nothing. All his years in Leningrad Senya had to rent rooms from strangers or

huddle in the corner of his mother's apartment. Because of this he left Svetlana and started working for The Red Dawn. The same thing happened there.

Senya got involved in the development of new popular haberdashery industry specializing in the production of metal and leather fancy products. In 1941 he was arrested for breaking the rules of industrial production. After our wedding he and Liuba decided to get married. By then they had lived together for 10 years already. They had no children but apparently loved each other. Liuba had a harsh personality. Even her own Russian girlfriends used to tell her that a Russian husband would have fought with her a few times a day. With Senya, however, they never fought – just argued. His tender name for her was «Liubtsa». When the war broke out she as a childless young woman was drafted to a labor brigade to dig trenches around Leningrad. By that time our entire family was in evacuation, including Mama. She was staying alone in Mama's apartment and I lived with my parents in the same courtyard. Every time she saw me with a nursing child in my hands during bombing and fire attacks, she'd start anti-Semitic conversations, and I swore to myself that, if we survived, she'd never step into our house again. Let Senya come alone. For example, instead of «Jews» she was saying «Zhid». She'd ask me: «Why is that everyone hates you so much?» Or: «You know, girls in the trenches advise me to tear up my passport, otherwise Germans will learn that I lived with a «Zhid» when they come – and they will shoot me!» When I retold all this to Senya, he did not believe me. At the start of the war he was in a prison camp in Tikhvin area. Then he was released and immediately conscripted to a repair-works battalion. There he met a lady doctor. Liuba somehow learned about it and said that she wanted nothing from him – except that he had to assist her in joining her parents in Moscow. The Leningrad blockade was over by then. He did what she asked. There were rumors that she was mentally disrupted.

After the war Senya came to Moscow. Mama lived with Betia at that time. He rented a place in the room from the widow of his friend who perished in the war. Her name was Eva. She was Senya's age. She had two kids from her first marriage: son Misha and adolescent daughter Raia. Senya and Eva became lovers and she got pregnant. He recommended her to make an abortion because he did not plan to marry her. Mama, however, wanted him to have a Jewish wife and children. She told Eva that if she keeps the child Senya will marry her. In 1946 she gave birth to son Marik, and a year and a half later

– another son, Lenya. Though Senya never married her, he officially confirmed his parenthood and his sons' family name is Bekker. He took good care of them – took them to school and summer camps; bought clothes and shoes for them and so on. They always felt his paternal presence. In time Eva gained weight and became prettier than before. Senya treated her well.

Liuba still loved him, and he also was soft for her. Every once in a while they met; he gave her presents – and so on. After Marik's birth she even suggested that he should take the boy from Eva and come back to her. But Senya refused, because their separation had been her initiative. After the war Senya once again went into haberdashery artisanship. It was a good source of income, but there was always a risk to get caught and sent to prison once again. In one of such dangerous moments he left Eva's house and temporarily moved to his friends' place. Their names were Yan and Fira, they were fairly young, but childless. Senya was a gentle, charming man and a womanizer. Women loved him. He started an affair with Fira, she got pregnant and gave birth to their daughter Vlada.

My last record was made last fall, at Goddard Campground. I haven't written all winter. I was busy with other things. Now summer is back; I am in a camp once again, and I am determined to write more actively.

Hence, let us continue about Senya.

His daughter was born in 1951. Yan suspected nothing, of course. He thought that Vlada was his child – and he was happy. When Vlada was born, Senya lived with us in Riga hiding once again from OBKHSS. Had they caught up with him, he would have gone to prison once again. He told us about his friends who after many years finally got a child. From his remarks and from special concern he displayed for Fira, I deduced that he had an interest in this child. In 3 or 4 years this love triangle produced one more baby – a boy named Grisha. This happened in 1954 when Senya was 48 and Fira – 36.

This time the situation became all too clear to members of both families. Something had to be done. Fira filed for a divorce on the grounds that Yan was not a father of her children and that he could not have children at all. Coming from a woman, this was a serious reason, and the divorce was granted. approximately at the same time Yan was arrested for private business ownership. Senya settled down with Fira and Eva, who was left alone, started visiting Yan in prison.

When Yan finished his sentence, he and Fira got married. Eva's oldest son from her first marriage was an artist – master of cere-

monies. His wife was a Russian woman named Kapitolina or Kapa for short, and they had one son. This son was already an adult man when his parents divorced and Kapa started an affair with her ex-husband's half-brother Marik (Eva and Senya's son). They got married, even though Marik was much younger. They have no common children and continue living together. Raia, Eva's daughter, married a Polish guy who escaped from the ghetto as a boy, while his entire family perished there. He was alone in the world. On Senya's request Mark and I went to Vilnius to their wedding. This was May 1952, I think. A year later they had a son. In 1956 they somehow managed to get the permission to leave for Israel. Emigration from the Soviet Union had not been open yet, but selected Jews from Vilnius and Poland managed to escape. In Moscow Eva received troublesome letters from Raia. I read one of these letters. Raia was cursing the day and hour when she decided to go to Israel. Raia and her husband were young people and had no specific skills. When they left, Raia was pregnant with their second child. In Israel they were installed in tin barracks under a scorching sun. Tin roofs would become so hot that people inside could not breathe. For a long time they could not find employment, and were literally on the brink of starvation.

At that time the Israeli state provided little help to immigrants. When the kids grew up a bit, Raia found a daycare for them and herself went to work in the kitchen. At least now they had enough food. Eventually her husband also found some manual job. They endured a lot of hardships, but gradually their life improved. They even opened a private café and worked there day and night without rest. I heard that many years later they even invited Fira to visit them. I think this happened in 1975.

When she returned, Eva told us that she did not like Israel. Naturally, Israel then was different from what it is today.

This was the story of Eva's kids from her first marriage. As for two Senya's sons, Marik and Lenya, they grew up, and started working after 7 or 8 years of school. They worked as elevator mechanics for «Russia» hotel in Moscow. Both served their time in the army. When he worked for the hotel, Marik was caught while dealing with foreign currency and spent several years in prison. When he got out, he had no permission to live in Moscow. He lived and worked beyond the 100 km radius and visited the city on weekends. After prison he was naked and barefoot. He had nothing. Eva and Yan had a life of their own, and Senya also had one. Still they were trying to help Marik out with money. Finally, he found Kapa. Unexpectedly, Eva

died after a surgery. This was before Marik's marriage. Part of her things Yan gave away and they were divided between the three brothers, and the other part Yan took for himself.

Lenya, Eva and Senya's other son, served in the army in the Riga area. Then he married, but several months later divorced his wife – and married the second time taking a nice, beautiful Russian girl named Nadia. They had two sons. Nadia's parents helped them to buy a 3-room coop apartment. They want to live in America, but for the last 10 years their emigration applications are being rejected because Lenya used to serve in missile troops, though only as a regular soldier. In the Soviet Union this is a sound enough reason to keep a person from crossing the border.

As for Senya, all his life he suffered from having nowhere to live. When he already lived with Fira and their two children, they finally received a small 2-room apartment in a new apartment building on Karbyshev Boulevard. Their former apartment – the one where Fira used to live with Yan – was actually a barn with no utilities: they had to bring water from somewhere in the street. Senya received this new apartment because he was a newspaper photographer. At first they were happy – but the children were growing. Vlada got married and gave birth. Grisha started working after 7-8 years of school. Senya and Fira also worked. They slept in one pass-through room with their adult son, and Vlada, her husband and her child lived in a narrow bedroom. Imagine 5 adults and a child lining up every morning in front of a bathroom. This breeds irritation and fights which are bad for nerves and for health.

Later Senya switched occupations and became a taxi driver. In due time he retired. His retirement pension was small and survival remained a problem. Then he decided to organize a button-production shop. There he worked for a number of years, and earned himself the highest pension one could get in the Soviet Union: 120 rubles. Fira worked at the orthopedic clinic. She retired when she reached retirement age.

In 1971 Vlada married a Russian guy, a Party member. His name was Yura Maliv. They had a boy Misha. Adjusting to each other, especially in an overcrowded apartment, proved too tough for them and in a few years they parted. Vlada was taking evening college classes and worked during the day. She graduated successfully, but never worked as a professional. Around 1980-1981 she found a very nice man from Vinnitsa, married him and brought him to live at her parents' place. That's how it happens in the Soviet Union: families

grow and apartments shrink... When she got heavy with her second child, she received an offer for a two-room apartment. She had been on a waiting-list for many years. According to the law, however, a family with two kids has a right for a 3-room apartment. So, Vlada said that she wanted a 3-room apartment. «First produce a child – then we'll see», she was told. Eventually, her baby was either born dead or died right after birth – I do not remember – and she had to agree to a 2-room apartment. in a little while she got pregnant again and gave birth to a girl – Innochka. and they all had to live in a two-room apartment. that's how it was.

Senya and Fira's youngest son, Grisha, emigrated to America in 1975, at the age of 21. Senya and Fira were also hoping to leave along with the rest of their family, but Vlada's husband did not give his permission for Misha's departure – and they all had to stay. Senya now is too old to start a new life; besides, his and Fira's health has been failing over the years. Therefore, it is unlikely that they will have the courage to go. Also, no one is allowed out right now.

Grisha, their son, at first moved in with our daughter Inna. This was his parents' will. He spent 4 months at her place, paying for nothing and saving money – for this is one thing he knows how to do. He worked in a watch-repair shop and then as a taxi driver. He married a young woman with a child and divorced her in less than a year. Then he married again. She bore him a son. Because of his difficult personality, Grisha has alienated all his relatives. We do not see him and we have not seen his family. Grisha, however, is hitting on 30. People change as they get older. Let us hope for the best



**Senya with his son Lenya.**



**Senya with Eva and Marik.**



**Senya with his son Marik.**



**Senya's children: Marik, Lenya, Vlada, Grisha. Moscow.**



**Senya and his wife Fira. Moscow.**



**Senya, Fira, Mark, Sofa.  
Riga.**



**Senya, Lev, Grisha Dvorkin -  
Betty's husband.**





**Mark, Kapa, Lenya and Nadya with Senya and Fira  
visiting New York from Israel.**



**Senya, Fira, Inna, her son Ilya and his wife Stephanie. New York.**