

Emma Balonova



This photograph was taken in 2004 in Vienna by my elder son Mikhail. I visit him in Vienna almost every year. Now I'll tell you about my children and you will understand how he got there.

My son Mikhail was born in 1944 and Yakov in 1955. They were very good children. We had no problems with them, we always understood each other.

They both were good sportsmen. The younger son was a volleyball player (he had a sports category), and the elder one went in for boxing and weightlifting.

Since he was an eight-class pupil, Mikhail spent each minute of his spare time reading serious scientific books on nuclear physics. He always studied extremely well.

At school he had no problems connected with his nationality, excluding one case. My elder son never fought (he was not a fighter by nature).

And suddenly I got to know that he had beaten a boy from his class.

I asked him what happened. Mikhail told me the following 'Mum, he called me a dirty Jew, and I (in presence of our classmates expressing full approval of it) pushed his face in.'

When he finished his school, Mikhail expressed a wish to enter either the Leningrad University or Polytechnical College [these higher educational institutions were among the best ones in the country].

But he understood how difficult it would be for him to enter [in the USSR higher educational institutions often did not accept Jews, the Polytechnical College in Leningrad was one of them].

Therefore he became a student of the Shipbuilding College. He finished the 1st course and came to a dean of the Polytechnical College. He showed him his student's record-book (there were only excellent marks in it).

Mikhail asked the dean if it was possible to change my College for the Polytechnical one having such marks. The dean looked at his marks and at Mikhail (he was fair-haired and did not look like a Jew) and said that they would be glad to have him as their student if he would pass through 3 extra examinations.

My son got 3 excellent marks and came to the dean again. Later Mikhail told me that the dean looked sadly at his passport, where his nationality was written in black and white. But he appeared to be a decent person and did not take his word back.

Yakov also studied at the Polytechnical College. Since his earliest childhood he was crazy about cars. So he did not graduate from the College, left therefrom and became a taxi driver. He was happy.

Sometimes he picked me up after his work to bring me somewhere I needed. I said 'Yakov, you have already worked 14 hours, have a rest now.' And he answered 'Mum, now I'll have a rest at the driver's seat.'

Yakov died early in his life from heart disease. And Mikhail works in Vienna now, he had been working there for 7 years. He signed a contract with the International Agency for Atomic Energy.

You know that 20 years ago there happened Chernobyl disaster [Chernobyl disaster was the largest damage of nuclear power station in the history of mankind: it resulted in atmospheric contamination in all European countries], and Mikhail was an expert in that sphere.

At present they invite him from all over the world. Recently he went to Washington to give a report and was awarded a medal for it. Mikhail is a very touching boy.

When he earned high money, he told me 'Mum, I know that you dreamed to see Paris since childhood.' And he bought us (my sister and me) tickets to Paris and we visited it indeed. Can you imagine it?