

Semyon Ghendler With His Sons Alexandr Danilyuk And Georgi Danilyuk



This is me with my sons: on the right is my older son Alexandr Danilyuk and on the left is my younger son Georgi Danilyuk. This photo was made when I was meeting my older son at the railway station in Ternopol in 2003.

Before retiring in the middle of the 1980s I decided to make some money for our old age. I went to the construction of an oil pipeline in Tumen in 3000 km east from home. They paid very well for

work. I lived in a tent. Living and climatic conditions there were very hard. My wife fell ill and in late 1987 I returned to Ternopol. Natalia had cancer. In late 1989 she died. I went back to the north after she was buried and worked there sometime longer. I cannot forget my wife. She was the only woman I loved in my life. Since then I've been alone.

My older son Alexandr graduated from the State University in Perm. He is an economist. During perestroika Alexandr finished college and became a high skilled expert in stocks. Alexandr lives in Kirov in Russia, 800 km from Moscow. My son is different from me in his marital life. He has a third wife now. I don't know them. Alexandr rarely comes to see me and he always comes alone. His sons from the first marriage Leonid, born in 1976, and Maxim, born in 1978, do not communicate with him or me.

My younger son Georgi entered Odessa artillery school after finishing secondary school. After finishing it he served in Poland. When our troops were leaving Eastern Europe in the 1990s he retired from the army. His first wife was Bulgarian. Georgi divorced her. She left their son David with her mother and went to work in Poland. We don't know where David is now. Georgi married a woman with a child. She is Russian. Her daughter Kristina gets along well with Georgi and with me. She calls me 'grandfather'. I treat her as my granddaughter and at Chanukkah I always give her some money as customary with Jewish families.

I had a good life. I had many friends wherever I was. The huge Soviet Union was my home and I feel bad about the breakup of the country. I still have friends in Cheliabinsk, Tumen and other towns. They often call me, even at night, due to the time difference. However, I feel sad about not being able to visit them like I used to when we might come all of a sudden without notification. We often went with families to Odessa, the Crimea or Caucasus. We cannot afford this now. In the past my monthly salary was enough to buy plane tickets and stay in any town of the USSR for a couple of weeks with my family and now I have to think twice even about commuting in the town. A ticket to the nearest town costs half of my pension, not to mention planes. All my savings that I earned so hard working in the north were gone when perestroika began. My sons support me and I try to support my daughter. The only positive thing that I see in perestroika is democracy for minorities, including Jews. I am a member of the Jewish community in Ternopol. Of course, I shall never become religious, but I like studying Yiddish, Jewish traditions and celebrating Jewish holidays in the community. The local Hesed provides assistance to pensioners. I've been to Israel. I admired this country. It was built with love, but I understood that I would never be able to live there. It's a different country for me with a different life style and hard climate. I couldn't wait until my month's long visit to my sister was over and I could return to Ternopol.