

Raissa Smelaya With Her Family



This is a picture of me with my first husband, Leonid Yakovenko, our son Vladimir Yakovenko and our daughter Irina Kantemir, nee Yakovenko. The photo was taken in Dnepropetrovsk in 1955. I got married at the beginning of 1948. A friend of mine who worked at the Fire Department of Kiev invited me to a party at her workplace. Leonid Yakovenko, the head of the Investigation Department, asked me to dance the whole evening. Shortly afterwards he became my husband. Leonid didn't know his parents. He was raised at a children's home. He is ten years older than I. He returned from the front with the rank of a major. My mother took it easy that Leonid was a Ukrainian man. What mattered to her was that he had an apartment because I was poor and miserable. My friends were jealous of my luck. We had a civil ceremony at the registration office. My mother and her sisters bought a big goose; it was their wedding gift. In the evening my mother arranged a wedding dinner for us. We had roasted goose and a bottle of wine. My aunts and my friend Zina, who had introduced me to my husband, came to the wedding. After the wedding I went to live with my husband. He had a two-bedroom apartment in Lipki, the best neighborhood in Kiev. There was heating, gas, a bathroom and a kitchen in this apartment. Soon we took my mother to live with us. My daughter, Irina, was born in February 1949. I left work after she was born and became a housewife. My husband provided well for the family. In 1950 my husband got an assignment to Dnepropetrovsk, a big town in Ukraine, 400 kilometers from Kiev. My mother and I followed him. We received a three-bedroom apartment. Our son, Vladimir, was born in 1950. I stayed at home. My friends were the wives of my husband's colleagues. There were Jews among them, but not many. I spent little time with them since I was busy at home. I tried to be an ideal housewife. We got together with friends on Soviet holidays and birthdays. In summer I took our children to a summerhouse on the outskirts of Dnepropetrovsk. My husband had a vacation of one month that he spent with us. I dedicated my life to my husband and children. We were well provided for. My husband died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1956. I went to work as a radio telephone operator at the Department of Internal Affairs where my husband used to work. The children went to kindergarten and then to school. I worked and took part in amateur art activities: I sang in a choir and attended a folk dance club.