

The Family Of Margarita Farka



New arrival in our family: my daughter Lilyana is born.
The picture was taken in Leningrad in 1957.

From left to right sitting are: grandmother Gitl, wearing a beautiful dark dress, which she liked very much; my daughter Lilyana, watching the world suspiciously (she is under a year old here) and grandfather Berko.

From left to right standing are: first - aunt Feiga, younger sister of grandmother Gitl; second - Margarita, mother's cousin; my mother Eidel (she smiled seldom) and me.

My first husband Ismail is not here, he has already left for Albania after graduating from the Forestry Engineering Academy named after S. M. Kirov in Leningrad.

It was at this Academy that I got acquainted with my husband-to-be, Ismail Farka. He came to the USSR to study from Albania, which was considered the country of 'people's democracy' at that time, like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and other USSR's allies.

The governments of those countries sent young people to study in the USSR, often such students were talented and promising. We fell in love with Ismail. I married him in 1956, when I was an undergraduate student.

Ismail was not a Communist. He was an excellent student at school and finished it with a golden medal. He also got excellent marks at all subjects at the Academy.

During the war his aunt hid Albanian guerillas anti-fascists. Owing to his aunt's guerilla secret address and his own talents, Ismail obtained the opportunity to study in the USSR, but he had no right to chose either an Institute or a profession.

He went to study where he was assigned to. Ismail had a religious Muslim family. He was an atheist, but his family observed the Ramadan fast and did not eat pork and kept other Muslim traditions. His parents were at first terrified when they found out about our marriage.

His mother wrote to him that all their relatives would turn away from us, it would be ineffable horror. However, when he wrote to his relatives about the birth of our daughter, all their protests stopped. A child was sacred for them.

I gave birth to daughter Lilyana in Leningrad in 1956. We lived at the dormitory with Ismail in a separate room. When he was an undergraduate, he asked the Embassy for permission to stay in the USSR, but he was refused. After he graduated from the Institute and defended his final thesis, he had to go back to Albania.

I remained in Leningrad and for several months worked as an engineer at the factory of musical instruments. Later I obtained a visa and the year after, in 1957, went to my husband together with our child. I was met and welcomed perfectly in Tirana, Albania. All relatives were very glad to see both me and our daughter.

His mother treated me very well. When she was asked, 'Is your daughter-in-law Russian?' she usually replied, 'No, she is from Leningrad'. I honestly do not know why she answered that way. My husband Ismail worked in the town of Elbasan and came home only for Saturday and Sunday. His parents had a house of their own in the outskirts of the town.

Since Ismail was not at home during the whole week, I had to go validate my papers together with his father. I did not speak Albanian at that time yet. I was asked about my nationality at one of the institutions. I said that I was a Jewess. Thus his father found out about my Jewish origin.

The information did not really influence the attitude of my husband's relatives to me. By the way, during the World War II many Albanians (both Muslims and Christians) behaved decently towards local Jews, saved them from the Hitlerites, as compared to the neighboring Christian Greece, where almost all Jewish population perished.

I lived in Albania for four and a half years, at first in Tirana, working as a construction engineer at a mechanical plant. Later I was chief power engineering specialist at a wood processing combine in the town of Elbasan.

My husband worked as chief engineer of that combine. He was member of the Albanian Workers' Party. Daughter Lilyana attended a kindergarten. It was difficult for her at first, but soon she learnt the Albanian language.

Soon the relationship between Albania and the USSR became complicated and developed into a critical conflict. I faced a dilemma: to stay or to go back home. I had to decide for myself and for Lilyana, since Ismail would not have been let out of the country. No one forced me to leave.

When I appealed to the Embassy of the USSR about our future life, I was told that I should have thought about it earlier, before I had gotten married. There were many such mixed families. Finally Ismail made a final decision - me and Lilyana had to leave for the USSR.

It was in 1961. After the relationships between the USSR and Albania were broken, there was no telephone or post connection between the countries, and during a number of decades Ismail and I knew nothing about each other!

Many years later, when we met after three and more decades, Ismail told me that it was the wisest decision in his life. Soviet wives, who stayed with their husbands, were arrested and imprisoned for 8-10 years.

Ismail was also thrown into prison, since he refused to divorce me officially. He was told, 'You don't want to divorce, which means that you hope, that the relations with the USSR will improve'.

He stayed in prison for more than 12 years, besides, he was tortured. During the following meetings with Ismail I understood that it was a very painful subject for him, so I tried not to ask more questions about it.