

## Emma Balonova's Son Mikhail And His Friend



This photograph was taken in Tallin in 1948. A boy first from left is an adopted son of our neighbor.

Her name was Anna Ernestovna. She was a remarkable woman, a real heroine. Such people are worth monuments; let my story about her be that monument.

When the war burst out, Anna Ernestovna lived in Pskov. Near Pskov Germans brought down a Soviet airplane, one of its pilots was wounded, managed to survive and reached Anna's house by crawling.

She hid him in the cellar. Above them in the same house there lived German officers. Every evening some girls visited them, they danced. And Anna told us 'If only they knew that they danced on the floor under which there was a Soviet pilot whom they could not find!'

Anna took care of him, fed him, and bandaged his wounds. When he recovered, he said 'Anna Ernestovna, thank you ever so much, now I'll go to find my relatives, they live in Pskov.' She answered 'Don't go, Germans will catch you, look around!' - 'No, I'll do it secretly.'

Several hours later somebody knocked at the door. She opened it and saw 2 Germans and the pilot. He was beaten within an inch of his life: she even could not recognize him! Anna always cried telling that story!

It turned out that Germans caught the pilot, beat him and forced to show the house where Anna was hiding him. So Anna, her husband and 2 their daughters were taken away into the concentration camp. On their way to the camp her husband died of gangrene.

Germans moved them from camp to camp in Poland and Germany. Americans liberated them from Buchenwald. Anna Ernestovna also had 2 sons. They were at the front line: one of them was on our side and the other one was with Germans (in Pskov Germans forced him to become their soldier).

I told Anna Ernestovna about a beautiful song An Yiddish Mother, and my husband (he was a fighter for equal rights) said 'Why only a Yiddish mother? And what about the other mothers?'

And Anna Ernestovna answered 'Isaac Yakovlevich, when they brought us to the camp, all mothers had the right to take their little children with them. But Jewish mothers were not allowed to do it. If they ran after their children, Germans shot them. That is why there is a song about Jewish mother.'

When Americans liberated Buchenwald, they equipped barracks, where camp prisoners were waiting for departure for different countries, with radio. In the barrack of Soviet prisoners they listened to Soviet broadcast.

Anna Ernestovna who suffered knowing nothing about her sons, suddenly heard 'Listen to the orchestra under the baton of Anatoly Gashnik.' So she got to know that her elder son was alive.

Anna Ernestovna vowed to adopt an orphan, if her sons survive the war. After the end of the war she went to Pskov and went through the process of adoption of a boy whose parents were lost.

She changed his name to Anatoly (her elder son's name), therefore she had got 2 sons named Anatoly. After that her son came to Tallin to his mother and sisters and settled in our apartment, too.

We made good friends with him. Soon he became a dean of the Tallin conservatory.