

The Children Of Anatoly Lifshits



This photograph was taken by me in 1959 in Leningrad. It shows my sons.

I tried to do my best bringing my children up like my mother did. And now I'll tell you about our children. All my sons grew up as lovers of mathematics. My elder son Alexander was born in 1941. He was a very gifted boy. He finished his school with a gold medal, studied at the Polytechnic College and was going to be transferred to the University. But at the age of 22 he drowned in Siberia during a camping trip. My younger sons graduated from the mathematics faculty of the University. At present they are experts in the theory of probability. Boris (born in 1949) finished a

school specialized in mathematics with a gold medal. It was impossible for a person with our surname to enter the University, but we decided to try. At the first examination (mathematics) he got not a good mark (three). We knew that it was absolutely impossible to enter the University having three among examination marks. Mark Bashmakov, the former teacher at Boris' school helped us very much (by that moment he worked at the University). He advised that Boris should pass through other examinations, and later address commission of appeal (the commission had to check fairness of evaluation of student's knowledge).

It was a very wise advice: Boris got fives for all other subjects (these marks were given fairly, because all the teachers knew that it was impossible to become a student having three). Then my son addressed the commission of appeal and his examination-paper was adjudged to be worth a five. Boris graduated from the University and tried to become a postgraduate student, but got three for Marxism-Leninism and did not manage to enter. To have a Jew as a postgraduate student was too much for the University! At that time Mark Bashmakov worked at the Leningrad Electrotechnical College. He invited Boris to work with him. Boris agreed with gratitude. By the way Mark played a large part in my life. I'll tell you about it later. Boris has been working at the Leningrad Electrotechnical College as a senior lecturer till now. He has two daughters.

My younger son Mikhail was born in 1956. At present he is a professor of the University, he is a mathematician too, and he devoted himself to the theory of probability. He also graduated from the mathematical faculty of the University. He has three children.

To my opinion my Mom had very reasonable educational principles. Our house was always open for my friends and for my sister's friends. Mom understood children very well. Here I can tell you that my friends often asked her advice instead of their parents'. At the same time mom was very impulsive by nature and a hard hitter. She was often on my back. But I deserved punishments, because I was a rather playful child. Here I'll tell you about an episode I remember very well. I was a schoolboy. I liked to study very much, it was interesting to me. But children at school were different. Their interests were different. Students were fond of gambling. I did not like it, but did not want to break with my comrades. We played at home of each participant in turn (when his parents were absent). So one day it was my turn. And I had no secrets from my mom.

I explained to her that it was my turn and my friends would come to play. Mom agreed. 10 boys came. We started gambling. Mom did not enter our room, but suddenly after a while there came a neighbor and asked our permission to play with us. He quickly gambled away his small sum of money and left. Then I understood that he was my mother's agent: she asked him to clear up the situation (what game we were playing, etc.). Mom did not want to come in herself because it would put me in an embarrassing situation in presence of my friends. A couple of days later Mom had a detailed talk to me about gambling. She even mentioned Dostoevsky. [Dostoevsky was a real gambler.] Mom forbade me nothing, but after that conversation I made my own decision and refused to gamble.