

Semyon Levbarg With His Wife Sarra Levbarg And Son Evsey Levbarg



My wife Sarra Levbarg, my son Evsey Levbarg and I. This photo was taken in Kiev in 1953.

In 1951 my friend Lyova Golfman introduced me to his wife's friend Sarra Krol. Sarra was born to a common Jewish family in Kiev in 1924. Her father Iosif worked in a store and her mother was a housewife. Before the Great patriotic War Sarra finished 9 years of a Russian secondary school. During the war Sarra's family was in evacuation in Yangiyul, in Uzbekistan. Sarra finished secondary school there. When they returned to Kiev after the war Sarra entered the College of Public Economy. When I met her Sarra was a planner in a trade organization. Sarra and I fell in love. We got married in 1952. Although I was a member of the Party and didn't mention my father's religiosity at work I decided to have a Jewish wedding. Sarra and I had a chuppah at the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street where my father had worked his whole life. We had a religious wedding in secret. Only Sarra's parents and my friend Lyova Golfman and his wife were at the wedding. The rabbi recited a prayer. I drank a glass of red wine, broke the glass with my shoe and we signed a wedding contract. There was no party at the synagogue. Our guests wished us happiness and gave their wedding gifts: crockery and bed sheets that were hard to get at that time. Later we had a wedding party at home where we invited our relatives and friends. We agreed to use our neighbors' apartment as well since we had about 30 guests at the wedding.

In 1953 our son was born. I named him Evsey after my father: Evsey is a Russian name and Ovsey is a Jewish name. They sound alike. At that time I couldn't give my son a Jewish name since it might cause a lot of teasing and mockery. My wife and I tried to raise him a Jew. Every year I fasted at

Yom Kippur in the memory of my father. We always had matzah at Pesach, even in those years when it might have jeopardized my career and membership in the Party. Our acquaintances, older Jews, bought matzah from the synagogue and brought it to us in the evening so that nobody could see. However, we ate bread at Pesach as well. We celebrated Chanukkah and New Year [Rosh Hashanah]. We had small parties with our relatives. We didn't celebrate Sabbath or follow kashrut since we were not religious Jews, but just gave tribute to the memory of our ancestors. Our son always identified himself as a Jew. After finishing school he went to Leningrad where he entered the Collage of Optics. After finishing his studies Evsey returned to Kiev. He couldn't find a job for a long time. He was a physicist, but he was a Jew and potential employers refused to hire him. He finally got a job at the Institute of Standardization. He is an engineer at the State Standard Agency now.

We've had a good life. We went to theaters and concerts at the Philharmonics together. In summer we spent vacations in the Crimea or the Caucasus having trade union discounts. We didn't have a dacha [cottage] or a car. We were two engineers and couldn't afford such luxuries. At the end of 1960s we received a three-room apartment. This is where we still live with our son and his family. We never complained about our lives and were content with what we had.