

Emilia Kotliar



This is me, Emilia Kotliar.

This photo was taken in 2002 by my son at home in Moscow.

In 1950s I began writing poems. I met young poets and we became friends. I found a job in a publishing house with low payment. I was to write responses to beginners of poets.

In 1958 my first book was published and I received a small fee for it. So I lived. I enjoyed writing poems tremendously, though it wasn't easy, hard to find a word I needed, on the whole, it was hard work. Soon young poets began to get invitations to recite poems at schools and in libraries.

I communicated with young poets in the poet section in the house of literature workers or in a café there. I wasn't a member of the Union of writers, but they allowed me to the house of literature workers. We recited our poems to one another there.

I didn't finish Literature College. There was a literature association 'Magistral' ['highway' in Russian] where I attended classes and took my entrance into literature. In 1961 I entered the Union of Writers. Then I began to have my books published. I had 6 books for adults and 15 children's books. I also translated 10 children's books.

It happened so that I never got a family of my own. My mother was my only close person. My mother was ill for a long time before she died. I had a very hard period before my mother died: both in my creative work and because of my mother's illness.

My life was always hard, but it was particularly miserable during that period. I wrote little and didn't have anything published at all. I didn't know where to apply myself and what to do with myself. We had very little money to live on.

I received rare and low royalties and a health pension, or I would rather say, poor health pension. And then I met arch priest Aleksandr Men' and adopted Christianity.

He was such a bright and light person that I followed him. His every move, each word, the sound of his voice, his oration imbued all. He was shining. There were strong fluids of light and kindness coming to people from him. I met a person who was convinced that Christ existed and I believed him.

I was different. Yes, a miracle happened to me. My life changed. I had lived with a quarter of my heart before, but then it became free and I started breathing.

And all of sudden poems came like from space, generously. I wrote a book of poems. I started attending a temple and I made friends and they are still my friends. I stopped being alone.

At first I was afraid of the thought that I was a Jew and Orthodoxy was religion of Russians and I didn't go to church for a long time. I didn't know that Alexandr Men' was a Jew. And only after I got to know that he was a Jew I felt at ease and began to cross myself.

So who am I? A Jewish woman in blood turned to Christianity. Of course, I am a Jew. Jews were my ancestors. I am interested in their life, history and traditions. I think I am genetically linked to Jewry. I don't know why, but I am touched by Jewish folk songs and dances.

I didn't get any religious education and was raised in a family of atheists, but I cannot say that my linking with Jewish people is merely ethnic or determined by a stamp in my passport. This is not the only reason why I feel my connection to Jewish people.

If in the past religion in Russia was determined by nationality, now it's not so. Not all Russian become Christian and the word Jew is not a synonym of a follower of Judaism. Though I adopted

Orthodoxy, I've identified myself as a Jew.

I don't attend a Jewish community since I haven't left my home since I fractured my leg. When I asked the Hand of Help for help a curator visited me and when she saw icons on the walls she was struck dumb and didn't know what to do at first, but then she decided to include me in the patronage list after talking to her management.