

Riva Birger With Her Younger Granddaughter Raisa



This is my mother Riva Birger with my younger daughter Raisa. The picture was made on New Year's eve in 1959 at one of Vilnius's streets.

I got married in 1957. We lived with my mother. My mother helped me the best way she could. She raised my daughters and tried to do work about the house. She strove to keep the Jewish spirit in the house. Of course, we did not observe Kashrut and Sabbath, but on Yom-Kippur all adults in the family fasted. On Pesach we always had matzah, from which mother cooked wonderful dishes. She taught my wife cook them. In 1968 was stuck with palsy. She had been paralysed for 5 years. All that time Maya had been looking after her. My mother died in 1973. It was dreadful for me to watch Jewish funeral of my father and aunts, when the defunct were being carried on the boards and put in graves without a coffin. I decided that I could not put mother straight in earth. Following advice of the religious Jew, who was reading kaddish over my mother, some apertures were made in the coffin. So, mother was buried in the coffin with some holes in it.

I have wonderful children. Elder daughter was born in 1957. She was named Raisa. At home we call her Raya to commemorate grandmother Haya as those names are euphonic. The second Marina is eight years younger than the elder one. My mother helped us raise daughters. She plied them with love to Yiddish and Jewish holidays. My daughters went to a Russian school. There were a lot Jewish students there, but Raya and Marina made friends with Jews as well as children of other nationalities. Raya and Marina did pretty well at school. Both of them, finished book-keeping and industrial production faculty of Vilnius University in due time. Our family had a pretty good living.

Of course, at first it was hard for young family, but I always worked hard and never found it disgraceful to make money from odd jobs. After retirement I kept working in several places. Every year we went to the resort in Palanga with our girls. Sometimes we went to the Black Sea.

Both of my daughters married Jews. My sons-in-law graduated from one institute Vilnius construction engineering. My elder daughter's husband Boris Bondar has his business in Vilnius. Raya and Boris have son Ilia, born in 1980. Ilia is a businessman as well. He graduated from business school. Ilia is married. Recently his daughter Rita was born. Thus, we are having a great granddaughter.