

Leonid Aptekar With His Grandson Vladislav



This is me with my older grandson Vladislav. This photo was taken in Kiev in 1985.

Our only daughter Svetlana was born in December 1952. After finishing school Svetlana studied in Kiev Industrial high school. After finishing it she worked as a rate setter at a plant and later she became an economist. Later she went to work as an economist at the district trade department. In August 1975 Svetlana married Igor Benyumov, a nice Jewish guy. Igor was born in Kiev in 1951. He

finished a college and worked as an engineer. They had a secular wedding. Traditional Jewish weddings were very rare at that time. My older grandson Vladislav was born in 1977, and Mikhail, the younger one, was born in 1985.

In the late 1980s General Secretary of the CPSU Gorbachev decided to change the course of the party and initiated Perestroika in the USSR. Of course, not everything was right, but Perestroika brought much positive. I think that the most important thing is that the Jewish life revived during Perestroika. At first these were books of Jewish writers, which had not been published in the USSR since about the 1930s. There were plays by Jewish writers staged in theaters and there were concerts of Jewish music. We were happy about it. Jewish newspapers and magazines started to be published, and various Jewish societies were established. Of course, I did not appreciate the final outcome of perestroika, the break up of the USSR [in 1991]. But now, I think, the situation is getting better. The national segregation in Ukraine has mitigated. Jews can enjoy the freedoms and we are second-rate people no longer.

There is a number of Jewish organizations, but the most significant among them for older people is Hesed. Jews get assistance from all over the world and Hesed is an evidence of this. The Hesed helps us a lot. We also receive food packages and medical care. Hesed pays for surgeries and hospital bills. This is important since older people could hardly find such money. However, this is not all. The Hesed also takes care of the young generation. I have two grandchildren and one great grandson and Hesed did a lot to raise them Jewish. Svetlana's husband, my son-in-law, also works in the Hesed.

When the Jewish school was opened, my grandsons went to study there. They were eager to learn about Jewish traditions and the Jewish history. They also have classes where they study prayers. When in my older grandson's class the teacher asked who wanted to be circumcised, my grandson Vladislav was the first to raise his hand. The ceremony was conducted at the synagogue. My grandson went there with his father. At first the children had treatments and then the brit milah was conducted. Later my younger grandson was also circumcised. My grandchildren are religious. They have everything a Jew needs for a prayer: a tallit and tefillin. Their life is still ahead of them and I hope they will be all right.