

Grigoriy Kagan



I, photographed at home on 9th May 2004. This photo was taken in Kiev. My orders are on my jacket on the left side: 2 orders of Red Banner, an order of the Patriotic War Grade II, combat field awards; an order of the Patriotic War Grade II awarded by the 20th anniversary of the victory in 1965. Below is a badge of a parachutist and a badge dedicated to graduation from the Leningrad Military Academy of Communication. On the right are medals for defense and liberation of towns and medals awarded by commemorative dates of the Victory and jubilees of the Soviet army and its Air Forces. This photo was taken in Kiev in 2004.

In 1967 I went to work as supervisor of a design group for fire safety automation and communication in design institute. I wanted to retire in 1975, but my management convinced me to keep working. I finally retired in 1995. They occasionally invite me to work and I never refuse. My institute built a cooperative apartment building and I received a two-bedroom apartment in it. This is where I live now.

In 1989 my dearest wife Asia died. The diagnosis 'cancer' had been given to her shortly before her death. We lived together for over 20 years and I was always grateful to my destiny for having sent Asia to me. Asia's sister Zoya had also lost her husband and we got married, but we lived together less than a year. Zoya obtained permission to move to the USA, but I did not want to go: everything I cherished was here. Zoya left. I suffered from being alone. My sons and grandchildren lived in different towns, and my friends, however numerous, cannot replace my family for me. I met my future wife Ludmila Slovskaia visiting my friends in 1994. Ludmila was born in Kiev in 1930. When we met, she was a widow. Her first husband Konstantin Slovskiy, a Jew, had died few years before we met. He was a wonderful person, and when we got married in 1996, Ludmila kept his surname. I had no objections. We have been together for 8 years. Ludmila worked as chief of the design group in the Institute of Electric Welding. I insisted that she quit her job. We are no longer young and we cannot afford wasting the time that we can spend together. My sons and grandchildren accepted Ludmila. They love her well. She is a wonderful person and one cannot help liking her. We are always together and what is interesting for one is significant and important for another one.

The break up of the USSR terminated my membership in the CPSU. I did not join the Communist Party of Ukraine. I started going to the synagogue. At first I just wanted to recall my childhood, when my father took me to the synagogue with him, but now it has become a necessity for me. I go to the synagogue every Saturday. On my relatives' death anniversaries I recite the Kaddish for them.

A number of Jewish societies were established during the perestroika. There is also Jewish press. The Jewish life is gradually developing in independent Ukraine. We have gatherings in the association of Jewish veterans twice a month. We know each other well. I also work in the section of Jewish veterans of sports at the Jewish cultural center. I am deputy chairman of this section. Our chairman is a former Olympic champion in fencing. On 24th September 2004 we celebrated the 82nd birthday of Ludmila Yakir-Kogan, the 6-time chess champion and 10-time finalist of Ukraine.

There is another Jewish organization in Ukraine, and that is the Hesed. I think, it is a very important organization for us. Many Jews would not survive, if it hadn't been for the Hesed's assistance. It's no secret that pensioners are below any poverty lines. Hesed is also involved in another important activity, and that is, attachment of Jews to traditions, to the religion and giving back our spirituality, lost during the Soviet rule.