

Riva Brukental



This is a picture of my wife Riva Brukental. The photo was taken for her passport in Uzhgorod in 2000.

I got transferred to Uzhgorod in 1958. I was chief engineer of a distillery. Our family got two rooms near the plant. My wife couldn't find a job. An acquaintance of mine, who was an instructor in the town party committee, helped her to get a job with a car maintenance company. She didn't keep this job for long. She fell ill with asthma and her doctor told her that gasoline vapor was too bad for her health. I talked with the industrial manager of the town party committee whom I had met at a

review meeting. He helped Riva to get a job at the financial department of the party committee, and from there she went to work at the tax agency. She liked her job and improved her skills by attending various training courses. Riva was very honest when it came to performing her duties. Sometimes my acquaintances asked me to talk to her so that they would have their taxes reduced or penalties canceled, but I was afraid to even mention anything like that to her. She never did anything illegal.

Riva was raised religiously. She spoke Yiddish in her family. I didn't quite remember Yiddish and we spoke Russian at home and only switched to Yiddish when we didn't want our son to understand the subject of our discussion. We couldn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home due to my position. However, we celebrated Pesach. Riva's parents sent us matzah from Chernovtsy. Riva cooked traditional Jewish food. This was the only Jewish holiday that we always celebrated.

Most of our friends were Jews. We celebrated Soviet holidays and birthdays at home. My wife cooked and we bought good wine. When we were younger we used to sing, dance and tell funny stories at our parties. We spent our vacations together. We spent two weeks visiting Riva's and my parents, and we went to the Crimea or Transcarpathia for the remaining two weeks. My wife and I worked a lot. I always came home late. I was exhausted and almost immediately went to bed. I always rested on weekends. I got up later, read newspapers and magazines and we went to the cinema or theater in the evening.

My wife died in 2002. Her colleagues and friends came to the funeral. People liked her. We arranged a Jewish funeral and buried Riva in the Jewish cemetery in Uzhgorod. Two rabbis from Israel, who visited Hesed at the time, conducted the ritual. They came to the cemetery. Almost all people came to the funeral with flowers. Jews don't bring flowers to a funeral, but those people didn't know about it. It's been almost a year that I've been going to the synagogue to recite the Kaddish for my wife. I don't know Hebrew and get a copy of the prayer printed in Russian letters. I didn't go to the synagogue before my wife died. I didn't believe in such things and didn't like it. It's too late to change one's convictions. I cannot say that I have faith, but I do read the Kaddish. I have to do it for a year.