

## Mikhail Leger With His Wife Yelena And Grandson Ilia



This is me, Mikhail Leger, my wife Yelena and my grandson Ilia. This photo was taken in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 2004.

In 1958 I went to work as design engineer, at the design office at the machine building plant named after Kirov in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. This is the biggest plant in the town. I still work there, even though I've stepped over the retirement age.

My wife and I celebrated Soviet holidays at home: 1 May, 7 November, Victory Day. In the morning all employees went to parades and then we got together at somebody's place and had parties. We drank and talked. On Jewish holidays my wife and I went to my parents. They still celebrated Jewish holidays. I don't think there was the so-called Jewry at that time. The synagogue was closed, and Yiddish was gradually squeezed out of our everyday life. However, we've never forgotten that we were Jews. Besides, non-Jews never allowed us to forget it.

In 1994 my daughter Klara married David Roif from Yampol. He was a veterinary. In 1995 their son Ilia, our only grandson, was born. Regretfully, my daughter's marriage fell apart. She divorced her husband in 1998. Klara and her son live in Mogilyov-Podolskiy.

I've been eager to move to Israel, but it was not to be. At first my wife and I waited till our daughter finished her studies. Our daughter did not want to move to Israel, and we were reluctant to leave her alone here. And now it is probably too late to start a new life.

I took up Jewish traditions after my father died in 1972. His death struck me. I felt lonely. Then my neighbor lady told me that I had to recite the Kaddish after my father. She wrote the Kaddish to me in Russian letters, and I, being 11 years old, read the Kaddish after my father and then after my mother. I did it at home. The synagogue reopened after perestroika. Every year on my parents' death anniversaries I read the Kaddish after my parents, as the rules require. I also bring treatments and vodka to the synagogue. I also go to the synagogue once or more times a week. Of

course, the services are not quite like I would think they might be. The prayers are read in Russian. I am sure God understands prayers in all languages, but I would rather they were read in Hebrew. Anyway, I am sure that we need a religious and a secular community. I am a member of the board of the Jewish community of the town and know how many problems we have. Most of Jews in Mogilyov-Podolskiy are old and ill people. They need food and medications. The community tries to provide whatever assistance it can. We have a box for contribution where people bring as much money as they can afford. Our compatriots, who visit the town every year on the day of its liberation from the occupants - they make the biggest contributions. Unfortunately, the middle generation of the people in their 40s stay aside. My daughter is very far from the Jewry, but I teach my grandson what it means to be a Jew. When we had a Jewish Sunday school, Ilia attended it willingly. The children were taught prayers and read books about the history of Jewish people. This school was closed due to the lack of funds. Ilia asks me questions and reads a lot. He'll soon start attending the synagogue with me. I wish my parents came to his bar mitzvah.