

Andrew Budhi
Family Stories

Stories about Childhood in the USSR



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Аннотация

This book tells you stories about how adults and children lived in the USSR. Children and adults perceive the world differently. Or maybe these differences are not so great? Is there anything to learn from your elders and what can you talk about with your family? These stories do not provide general recipes, but they are based on real events. The collection presents the story “For the overall development” which was included in the shortlist of the all-Russian competition Turgenev in 2018.

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Family Stories, or Notes about Our Features

(the small narrative in short stories)

Everyone is somewhat similar to each other in our large family. For example, my mother is like my grandmother in figure and my grandfather in sense of humor. Dad has a voice like his father, my other grandfather. I have my mother's eyes and ears, and I laugh and scratch my head like my father... But each of us has something special, as my grandfather says, the personal features, which manifests itself not in appearance, but in behavior, in a special approach to doing something. Sometimes I noticed that mom and dad were doing the same thing differently, but I didn't pay any attention to it. One day my grandmother told my parents: "Yes, your approach to many things, your methods of solving problems is different, but the result is simply amazing." I don't know if she was talking about repairs or our upbringing or something else, but from that moment I decided to observe the different approaches of my relatives, and this is what I got.

Mother's Approach

On Saturday, my mother got up early and started cleaning. At first, she thought a little: “cleaning or repair?” She chose the cleaning. Dad was on a business trip for the second day, and mom didn't want to do repairs without him. Generally speaking, we did repairs about four years ago. But in recent months, my mother constantly did not like something somewhere, and the words “new repair” sounded often. At the next mention of repairs, dad would grab his briefcase and run off to work: he can work in his lab on weekends. In the doorway he usually spoke: “The money is in the nightstand. You can take and repair whatever you want, and I'm happy with everything I have now...”

The cleaning was routine, not general. My mother dusted and mopped the bedroom and living room floors. We did the cleaning ourselves in the nursery room yesterday. My mother said we could clean on Friday during the holidays. We did it all day while my mother was at work. But we did it only when she came and organized the whole process. So we slept, and my mother looked in the nursery and went to wash the kitchen.

“Still, the wallpaper needs to be replaced”, she told herself as she finished mopping the floor. “It's eight o'clock – the store is already open. I'll go and buy the wallpaper.” My mother has long looked for new wallpaper for the kitchen at a nearby store. She changed clothes resolutely, but as she went to the door,

she remembered that she would not move the kitchen cabinets without our father. Mom hovered for a few minutes at the door, then looked carefully at the wallpaper in the hallway and decided to replace it: nothing needs to be moved in the corridor. She fixed her hair and ran merrily to the store. She returned a few minutes later. Mom walked around the corridor with a tape measure, a piece of paper, and a felt-tip pen and ran away again. She came back about two hours later.



We were already awake and rattling pots in the kitchen in search of breakfast.

“You can imagine, the necessary wallpaper was not in the store,” said my mother, “I had to go to another one... and then to the construction market... And look at that, what a fun color I found!”

“Mom, we should have breakfast,” we said.

“You should find something, make some sandwiches, and go for a walk,” she replied and hurried to change clothes.

We were leaving on the street, and that time my mother was trying to pull off the first strip of wallpaper in the corner of the corridor with a spatula.

“Bye, mom,” we shouted.

“Don’t come back soon,” she replied.

We would have walked until night, but I wanted to have lunch, especially there was no breakfast as such. We arrived about three hours later. My mother was still busy in the corner of the hall.

“Why do you so early?” she asked, but didn’t turn around.

“We want to have dinner very much,” we replied.

“Cook the macaroni, make the salad, and go outside,” said mom, “don’t you see: I’m doing repairs.”

“Repair” was not visible. I could see the half-torn strip of wallpaper and my mother panting. “What was the strange glue?” she said. “I can’t wash the wallpaper off or peel it off.” We ate and left.

Late in the evening, the picture of the renovation was more optimistic: my mother tore off two whole strips of wallpaper and was going to start a third.

“Mom, it’s nine o’clock. Have you eaten?” we asked.

“There’s no time for food now, kids, – repair!” answered my mother. Then she thought a little and went to the kitchen to eat macaroni and salad.

“Well, now I’ll rest a little and take the third strip off,” she said cheerfully after dinner. “And you play and go to bed!”

We went to play, and my mother lay down on the sofa and began leafing through a fashion magazine. Half an hour later, she could be heard talking on the phone with a friend: “Sveta, what crows we are! Tomorrow is the last day of discounts at the Summer fashion store. Let’s go there in the morning...”

“Mom, what about repairs?”

Mom turned around: “Repairs? Oh, yes, repairs...” She looked out into the corridor, examined the “repairs” and said decisively: “Yes.” We didn’t know what that “Yes” meant until mom climbed up on the mezzanine and pulled out a brand-new roll of old wallpaper.

“You know what, fellas,” she said thoughtfully, “it’s not a bad wallpaper, and it’s really good. Tomorrow we will return everything to its original state!”

The words “we’ll return everything back” made us wince, and we backed into our room and began to whine: “Why will we... maybe you yourself... we want to go for a walk...”

“You can take a walk in the morning, while I’m at the store with aunt Sveta, and after lunch we’ll quickly do everything,” said my mother sternly.

By the evening of the next day, two new strips of “old” wallpaper were on the wall. My mother promised to bake us a pie for our friendly help next Saturday. Of course, if there will no unexpected sales.

My dad arrived on Monday. He would never have found out about the “corridor updates” if he hadn’t tripped over a bucket of wallpaper glue on the loggia.



“Mamunechka, what is this?” he asked. Mom smiled, shrugged, and nodded for dad to come into the kitchen without

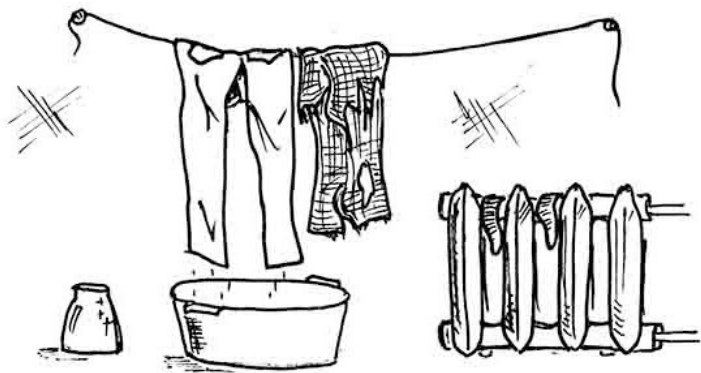
saying a word. There was such a wonderful smell coming from there that dad also smiled, shrugged, and went to supper.

Dad's Approach

Dad is very economic. Once dad repaired a lamp – fixed the wiring, cleaned the contacts and washed the glass lamp shade. He washed the lamp shade in a basin. He poured hot water, poured washing powder, stirred it in the water, and carefully wiped the lamp shade with a sponge.

When the lamp shade was clean, dad decided not to pour out the soap solution. He washed the lamp shade under the faucet, and threw his waiting for washing pants into a basin of soap solution. When the pants were washed and rinsed out in the bucket, dad put socks in the basin. Now the clean and fresh socks were hanging on the radiator, and dad was standing in thought by the basin with a completely black soap solution and did not dare to pour it out. Probably he wanted to wash something else. Dad looked around for a long time, looked under the bath, in the wardrobe, finally found an old floor rag, washed it, poured out the water and went to the kitchen to make tea. He was completely satisfied with himself and sang, “We were born to make a fairy tale come true”¹.

¹ Aviamarsh (“March of aviators”) is a Soviet song. Composer: Y. A. Hite, author of the text: P. D. Herman. The song was first published in 1923.



Grandmother's Approach

Grandma gets up very early. We are still watching the penultimate dream, and indescribable wonderful smells stretch by thin invisible streams from the kitchen to all corners of the house. Everyone slowly wakes up, goes to wash, and grandma is combed, neatly dressed and already sets the table. Once-once – pancakes and porridge are scattered on the plates... omelet, jam, tea, candy... She says something fancy to each, removing the scum from the broth for dinner soup at the same time.

“Put the dishes in the sink,” she says, and runs off to work.

On Saturdays, my grandmother goes to the market. She does not trust anyone to buy food: “If you buy the wrong kind of meat, you will get the wrong kind of borscht.” Tall and strong she walks through the market; she haggles, does not hesitate before visiting sellers – they always give in to her and respectfully bow after her: my grandmother leaves them small change.

She returns home, and magical action begin in the kitchen. All the pots are boiling and all the pans sizzle at the same time. Her clever hands cut carrots, onions, beets, potatoes, garlic; pound peppers in a mortar. At the same time, the grandmother manages to talk to someone on the phone and look out the window.



Around ten o'clock friends-neighbors begin to come on the smells in the apartment. Grandma doesn't lock the door – everyone comes in without knocking: “Nikolavna, are you home?” And it is clear without a question that she is at home. Neighbors sit down on a sofa or stools. Grandma finishes cooking dinner and begins to work on the preserving food for the winter. Cans, basins, buckets of cucumbers and tomatoes begin to appear from somewhere. She washes, boils all of this, manages to treat guests to borscht and talks to them on various topics. And the neighbors eat and praise the food, and then ask for something and leave. Then new ones come – and so on until lunch.

We have lunch at a large table in the living room. Grandma

delivers meal herself. Each dish is greeted with a happy “mmm, how it smells!” and everything is eaten. “Plates like cleanliness!” grandmother says. After lunch, we go to our rooms to lie down. Grandma also lies down for half an hour, and then begins to gather in the garden and calls grandfather. They leave – grandma cheerfully, grandfather reluctantly. The apartment is silent, except for the measured ticking of an old clock.

The whole garden is on my grandmother. She weeds, collects, and waters. The grandfather only brings water and fertilizers and digs up where the grandmother needs. The grandmother manages to prepare some “as at home” meal in the garden house. Neighbors from other sites go to the smell.

In the evening, grandma does the laundry, cooks supper, again welcomes some old ladies and manages to talk to us and them...

It would seem that after such a Saturday, grandma will sleep until noon. Where there! As soon as the sun came up, my grandmother shakes my grandfather: “Start the engine, we’re going for mushrooms.” Grandfather can’t refuse grandmother. We also get up and plop sleepily into the Moskvich². Baskets and bags with provisions are loaded into the trunk. Grandma sits in the front seat and commands: “Let’s go!” Neighbors in the house or garden, who have cars, usually go with us in one or two cars. They like to ride with my grandmother. They know that there will always be mushrooms and a great picnic.

In the evening, the whole family is engaged in processing

² Moskvich is a brand of Russian Soviet car (Moskvich 412).

mushrooms: washing, cleaning. Grandmother directs and does most of all herself. Neighbors come in unlocked door – there are again conversations-conversations, a long supper, preserving mushrooms...

“Grandma, how do you manage to do a hundred things at once?” I ask.

She shrugs: “I don’t even know.”

I don’t let up, I think there must be some secret here. I ask my grandfather:

“How does grandma do this?”

“Years of training,” laughs my grandfather.

“Did she go to the some training?”

“Yes,” says the grandfather and smiles again, “this training is called responsible approach to family life!”

I think my grandfather is joking.

“No, really, how does she manage to do so many things, sometimes at the same time, and always well?”

“When your grandmother and I met, she only knew how to cook some kind of soup and constantly she didn’t add some ingredients, or she added something more than normal. And I mended shirts better than she did. But day after day, year after year ther was a constant cooking, washing, ironing, darning – and here is the result. And in addition, our grandmother likes her work – although she is retired, but she works part-time. When she retires completely – she’ll think of something else. She’s so energetic.”

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