

Ynet NEWS, March 24, 2010, translated from Hebrew

Grandparents, Immigrants, and Suddenly Parents Again: “There’s No One Else.”

By Yael Brenovsky

Photographs by Avishag Shar-Yeshuv

Zolpo serves as Sapir’s mother and father, who were killed in a criminal attack; Lev fought in World War II, but the real battle is raising orphaned Oleg to become an officer in the Air Force. Immigrants who became parents again, by the force of events, are now asking, if it’s not too difficult, for a little help from the state.



Morevich

At first glance, the tour bus travelling north from Tel Aviv north looked like any other tour bus. The children and teenagers crowded in the back were talking and laughing out loud. The adults were talking quietly in the front. Just one thing might raise the curiosity of the more careful observer: The skipping over of an entire generation. The passengers in the front were grandparents who came from the FSU, and behind them were their grandchildren, whom they are raising here by themselves. A large number of these children never knew their biological parents.

This is a special project, going on for almost four years, of the SELAH organization. In the framework of the project, help is given to immigrants, which includes the financial and emotional support of grandparents who, for different reasons, are acting as parents to their grandchildren. In addition, very often these adults are themselves bereaved parents who have put their sorrow and personal pain aside in order to be strong for their orphaned grandchildren.

Zolpo Nachshonov, age 61, made aliya with her four children from the Caucasus twenty years ago. Six years ago, her daughter and her husband were murdered when they were in a used car lot and a hand grenade was thrown into the lot and hit them. After two years, Zolpo's husband died of sorrow, and she is raising her six-year-old granddaughter Sapir by herself. "Eight years we waited for her. My daughter had a very difficult pregnancy. When Sapir was two months old, her mother wanted to go back to work as a nurse in the hospital. So she and her husband decided to buy a car, and we lost both of them," says Zolpo. "It's lucky they didn't take Sapir with them, she was saved by a miracle."



Zolpa and Sapir Nachshonov

Sapir looks for the road to heaven

Nachshonov tells how from the day Sapir learned to talk, she didn't stop asking questions about her father and mother, and the psychologist recommended that she explain to her that her parents were in heaven. "When she was very small, she tried to find the road to heaven, and when she got bigger, she understood better. I live in fear, and every moment I have to know where Sapir is. From the day I decided to raise her, I stopped thinking about myself. We liked to read books together and take trips."

Sometimes little Sapir calls her grandmother/mother Mother, and sometimes Grandma, and seems very attached to her and hugs her all the time. “I bought a special book for parents, to learn how to raise a little girl. I try and do the best I can, but it’s not always easy. Also financially, with all the payments to school, it’s very difficult.” Financial problems and needs are common to all the grandmothers and grandfathers who came from the FSU and are raising their grandchildren by themselves. All of them came to Israel at a relatively advanced age and did not acquire savings. They are also at an age where it is difficult to work, so that all of them live only from social security payments.

Fifteen years ago, the two children of Nadiezda Cherkassov, 61, came to Israel, and she, an outstanding teacher, decided to remain behind and continue her career. Around ten years ago, when her husband died suddenly, and she was left on her own, she decided to come to Israel to live with her children. Her daughter, in her 20s, was a single mother to David, today 14 years old. The daughter met a new partner and together with Najezhda they moved to Beersheva. There, little Sasha was born, today nine years old. Six years ago, Nadiezda’s daughter suddenly felt ill, was rushed to the hospital and died of heart failure. “At a later stage, the children told me that until the ambulance came, they sat and watched their mother hovering between life and death, and also when the paramedics tried to save her, they were still sitting on the floor and watching. Despite the fact that they were very small, they will never forget that.”



Sasha Cherkassov

How will we pay for school?

When her daughter died, Nadiezda didn't have a free moment to dwell on her sorrow. She decided to take the children and raise them. The court also ruled in her favor. As she tells her story, occasional tears run down her cheeks. "Sasha's father left for Russia, and I immediately turned into the mother of both the children. We live together and do everything together. Even when it comes to our small budget from the social security, we decide what to do together." She says that when her daughter died, it was very difficult, but she had no choice but to take herself in hand and to decide how to move forward and raise the children. "They are wonderful children who go to extracurricular activities and try to never disappoint me. If they see me crying, they come and hug me. They remember everything and we travel together to the cemetery. Financially, it's not easy. We try and save on everything we do. If the country would worry about us a little more, I am sure it would be much easier, and I could give them more. Soon I will have to pay much more for school, and I don't know how I will do it."

The only son of Lev Murevich, today 82, was murdered in Russia, and on his grave, Lev swore to raise his son who was left behind. He came to Israel ten years ago together with Oleg, who went to the army at age 18 and today is finishing an officers course in the Air Force. Lev, who fought in the Second World War, is very proud of his grandson, whom he calls "my son." "I was a grandfather and grandmother and a mother and a father. I learned to cook and clean. We are very close and talk about everything. I am a pianist and I also taught him to play. Today, from his army base, he calls me three times a day."

Natasha Koretz, a social worker for SELAH, says that if parents who are new immigrants find it hard to manage, for grandfathers and grandmothers who raise

children, it is many times harder. “We accompany them and give them individual attention, and also special workshops, where we explain to them about education and Israeli realities. This is a very difficult objective. They have to be parents, and from a health, emotional and financial perspective, this is a very difficult challenge. We should not forget that these are bereaved parents, who did not have a moment to allow themselves a mourning process.”