



IRUSHKA'S BOOK

The Story of Life of a Little Girl



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FOREWORD

The story of a little girl is such a story reading which many people could reflect their own children's early years; they can experience again those reverent days and nights of a child's first years of living, parental worries and feelings of something very important happening around. At the same time every story like this is unique, so peering into the narratives of Irushka's life we could capture the personality birth miracle. Her personality claims to be unique even now, in the first years of her life and not in the distant future; it states to take its own place in the endless cycle of people's stories. Perhaps feeling special Irushka says about herself one November morning: "I'm a prodigy girl!"

This story isn't just a story of "one girl" for me and my wife Olga Reshetnikova. It's a story of parental happiness of our close friends, Irushka's parents - Alexander and Valentina Bondar. We didn't have a chance to watch Irushka grow daily, but every time we saw her, we were interested to notice the powers waking up in a child, the powers given by the parents: their character, mood, mutual inspiration and ambitions. Meanwhile everything that comes from parents gets a new tinge; it transforms into a completely new personality, spiritually develops with the help of a little person's will. Those parents are happy who don't consider a child as their own projection but advance to understand her unique freedom and the right to independence from the outset. Alexander and Valentina belong exactly to such a happy example.

The diary is not as much the girl's diary as the one of adults taking care of the child. It's quite interesting to make a point how various nannies emphasize different important things in the upbringing. For example, one nanny writes that day is very special because Irushka went to Church while the other admits that any day is great when Irushka wakes up in good mood. One nanny marks how amazing a sense of friendship is awakening in the child, whereas the other notices sprout of competition and jealousy in the young temper. Each nanny is absolutely right even if they contradict each other and consider the child to be completely different: now open and trusting then dreamy and thoughtful. A child's nature itself is contradictory; more specifically the search of way out of these contradictions promotes personal advancement and reveals the moral power of personality. It's so hard for Irushka to make it up with the girl she offended; it's so difficult to part with "fish-shampoo". These are all signs of hard inner work to overcome all hindrances and complications on the way toward personal freedom.

The varied world of things, phenomena, people and substances around a child enters her life gradually and fulfills it. However the feelings of abundant life and happiness don't come up because of all the variety a man can possess but depends on his ability to devote his life to the most vital things such as love, friendship, belief and amity to others. Irushka begins to realize it for the first time when meeting with a friend or ostents of parental love become much more important than new toys or tasty food. Bringing a child up means to explore all spheres of her life and help her satisfy human wants independently. These wants can be combined into three groups such as fundamental, basic and essential. Fundamental wants make themselves known: they are demands for food, warmth, safety; for everything that comes from the nature. Basic wants are demands for communication, learning and self-development. These demands should be backed and guided but they still reveal themselves a lot. However it is essential wants that create a person for all and all of human dignity. They are demands for love, belief and spiritual development, genuine and full living existence. These demands don't pop up on their own accord; they are the result of every person's spiritual work. It depends mostly on parents what a child's inner work will be oriented to. And the fact that Irushka's parents attach such significance to her spiritual development, her belief and merciful attitude to others is the best guarantee that she will be used to hard inner work and creating genuine values. Such work will hardly make her life easier; it's most likely to be the other way round. She will be more emotional and will have to overcome more obstacles than those who don't pay attention to anything around them except material demands and be.,-neficial contacts. But such an attitude

makes life truly honest, filled with the true value of the intrinsic freedom and infinite happiness. If someone says that to speak this way about the four-year child is too early, it means that this person has missed something very important in his life and the lives of his loved ones, something that cannot be seen but can be felt by the heart. Irushka like any well-developed child has got her favorite and lousy friends, work, responsibilities, meals, places, toys and life events. She has got beloved people and nannies she loves differently. She has got dreams and fantasies and there is a real life, but sometimes they switch places. Anyway the most important thing Irushka has is attentive, loving, caring parents, who don't separate a child's life from their own. Who can be interested in this book?

Nannies

It is nannies who are invisibly in the centre of attention in the book. There are some rules to remember when dealing with their joyful but hard work:

You are employed by parents not by children;

You are not to replace parents or teach them something, you are simply to help them, when they ask you for help.

You should see parents with a child's eyes, and look at a child with the heart of parents.

Add some patience, selflessness and love to these simple rules and you will definitely cope with everything.

Teachers

They listen to parents with interest, but draw conclusions according to their own specific guidelines, for they are teachers who know what such things may be like and what they should be like.

Psychologists

Psychologists listen to parents attentively as well, but their conclusions may turn out to be absolutely unexpected, for they on the contrary know for sure that everything can happen but if there is no way to change something it is enough to explain it in the right way.

Young parents

They have no idea how it should be like and are eager to know how it is organized in other families.

Parents who feel nostalgic

It is a chance to recollect how it used to be in their family and take an effort to find out if some things in their teenage child are similar to what they used to be when he/she was a baby.

Parents themselves

Imagine that such recollections as "do you remember what she was wearing and what she said, and who taught her this or that, etc." could help to solve so many family arguments and nice everyday quarrels. And proud parents, when musing on those days passed, can show their child's vivid biography together with photos and videos.

Irushka

Probably she is to be the reader most thankful to her parents. When the girl is grown-up enough to read fluently and hardly remember herself in her early childhood, she will be able to come back to those days, when it all started to realize how wonderful and amazing the life is. It's especially true if you are reading a book about yourself.

Oleg Reshetnikov,
Family's friend and Ph.D.

Father's introduction:

I come from the North Caucasus and we've got the following tradition: a future father on the eve of his baby's birth spends time partying with his friends. I have always respected traditions and followed them; however on the night of 13th to 14th May 2003 before our little daughter was born I was so nervous that I completely forgot this very useful tried-and-true tradition. As a result I was home alone in the evening, doing nothing in particular which could still distract me from breathless expectation of news from my wife I had driven to maternity hospital earlier that day. Her call was absolutely unexpected at the most unexpected time for me: at 3 o'clock in the morning (Irushka was born at 2:30 in the morning) and her calm and happy message: "We've just had a baby daughter" knocked the sand from under me for quite a long time. Yes! It's absolutely necessary to respect old traditions and expect a baby's birth in a circle of friends!

This jokey foreword is about to introduce my completely serious confession that I treated my future daughter's birth very seriously. I tried to do everything so that our first-born child would be long hoped-for and our mother would have everything needed to take care of the baby and her life wouldn't be very troublesome. It happened so in our family that our mother being a really sensitive and sophisticated person often tells me something important for her while I can't realize the most crucial point of it: what exactly I should do in a situation like that? (It's a shame but it happens quite often.) My shallow question which seems the right one to me is "What should I do, honey?" turns out to be shallow indeed. It becomes clear from my wife's answer that I shouldn't do anything but just listen to her. (!) Every time it happens the situation proves that we are absolutely different people with our mother: she's sensitive and delicate while I'm practical first and only then sensitive. Besides I'm sensitive exactly towards our mother's feelings. Therefore, being that kind of person I described myself, I had tried my best to prepare comfort conditions before our daughter was born. Those efforts included the one in which I tried to imply the idea of having a babysitter in our family. I backed the idea as long as our daughter having grown up a little told us herself: "I don't want have a nanny any more, I want stay with mother!"

Having parted with a nanny we felt that our relationships with Irushka and Irushka's with us changed and became less comfortable that they had been with a nanny. I came across a theoretical explanation of this in Agatha Christie's memoirs book, in the chapter where she described her childhood and her relations with the nanny. For example she claimed that a mother and a father are heavenly creatures for a child, existing for joy and pleasure, giving happiness, love and presents. While a nanny is a necessity, she's a hard daily work that's not always pleasant. Our life proved that Agatha Christie's point was absolutely true.

Looking back I believe that I was right insisting on having a babysitter for our daughter. I was also right in my idea that a nanny should write Irushka's diary. "Father is always right!" My wife's correct and wise comment seems to me quite relevant in connection with the above said.

Valentina chose a name for our little girl and I silently and happily approved. Irina – that was my mother's name – Irina Pavlovna Skvortsova was her full name. I'll write a few words about her later. Having given our daughter my mother's name, I think my wife Valentina paid respect to my sonly feelings towards my mother and probably meant something else which I don't quite understand but certainly like.

When we called our daughter Irina something interesting and even mysterious started to happen in our family. Our little girl was only a bit over one year old when I brought home a portrait of my mother in oil painted by an incredibly talented artist Aleksey Podgaynyi and put it on the easel for everybody to see. Irushka couldn't speak at that time so she mimed me to pick her up and take her to the portrait where she stroked it with her hand and said something that struck me right into the heart: she said "Baba" that is "grandma" in Russian.

Now when I'm writing this Irushka is almost grown up (four years and a half seem quite a significant age for a young girl!) she resembles my mother more and more: in appearance, gestures but mostly in character. She's sometimes noisy and persistent especially when she's trying to defend her ideas and wishes. She's a real Cossack woman, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Terek's Army Cossack chieftains who served in the Guard of His Majesty! Every day and month we discover more and more traits of Irushka's grandmother and my mother Irina in our daughter. She is as kind and tender, fragile and gentle but at the same time as brave and rigid in achieving her goals, she's tireless and creative if speaking in modern language. We like it when the latter is shown in creating and then telling us unusual stories, creating imaginary plots in games and a mess which looks like one only to us but to her it's a very logical bunch of household items and toys placed where she stays.

Talking about this mess thing created in a house by a child who is full of ideas and intends to play I would like to share one pedagogical secret which I often use to calm down my little daughter. After the rooms where Irushka played and left in a complete mess are put in "good order" (usually it happens when she isn't at home) I often tell her about dwarf Hans and his wife Isabella who come to the Crimea from a far away Switzerland to have a rest in the sun and clean up all the mess in Irushka's house. I shall admit that the story of Hans and his wife Isabella isn't very popular with Irushka. She likes more a story of a girl called Anastasia who follows hard after Irushka. Anastasia like Irushka herself travels to different countries and cities which Irushka has already visited and can easily recognize in the stories. This Anastasia girl is actually Irushka's shadow. It doesn't really bother Irushka and doesn't suggest her to ask a question: "Why haven't I met Anastasia yet?" She isn't even interested in Anastasia's age or what she looks like. Probably there's something attractive for a child in the stories about her shadow.

I should mention that our daughter's pet name – Irushka was created by the first babysitter, also Irina by name. She called her "Irushka-toy". The name Irushka was caught on while the "toy" was forgotten somehow and we still call our daughter Irushka mainly.

Referring to the topic of nannies again I'd like to admit that pleasant work of initial proofreading of this book added up to correcting evident boners but not the style as such. I decided to leave it as it is so that a reader could feel the shades of nannies' attitudes towards Irushka and towards working with a child on the whole together with the local coloring. Reading the text carefully I noticed that all the adults, I mean parents and nannies were looking at the one and the same child (our child) from quite different perspectives. Many events in the child's life are described differently by nannies and would be described other ways by parents. Many things were missed and weren't included into the book. I consider all these missed things quite important or at least funny.

It's not worth restoring all the missed things; otherwise it would mean to write a completely new book. While reading this book you can see the difference in nannies' educational background and general knowledge, but what's more important you can find out their real attitude towards the child and taking care of her, teaching her different things and developing the so-called younger generation.

I should admit I tried not to break in on nanny-child or nanny-mother relationships and after watching nannies work I came to the conclusion that's not at all a discovery but which had practical and moral importance for our family. The thing is: every nanny no matter how physically strong she is needs to have at least two days off every five work days because her work is so responsible, tense and significant. Some nannies tried to work longer without days off due to their own reasons or probably just because they weren't experienced enough and it didn't mean anything good either to a child or to the nanny herself. I came to the conclusion that a

woman who works as a nanny has a certain limit of physical and emotional potential. If a nanny can't define her own limit then it's up to a child's mother to interfere and not let a nanny exceed her resources. In this connection I've always asked myself: what is a mother's limit of physical and emotional strength? I thought of my mother who brought me up in hungry postwar times and endured all possible and impossible hardships of a lone parent.

If a mother exceeds the limit of her physical and emotional resources probably there can be the following consequences: nervous break downs, child abuse, hysterical behavior, a desire to shift responsibility of taking care of a child for some additional institutions like day nursery, being wrapped up in work or career at the same time leaving a child for someone to care about. It might happen with other mother however it didn't with my mother. Does it mean that such mothers aren't ready to become ones? Who and how can help such a mother? Shall someone fulfill her functions as a mother?

I must admit that I was probably too strict and demanding in some things. For example, I insisted that Irushka should always be dressed smartly and her clothes would be changed a few times a day. I also claimed some other things. However I must confess I never told a nanny about my demands directly but always with the help of our tactful mother.

Besides, watching our nannies work I discovered that Irushka is "a sweet present" mainly for us, her parents. For other adults she's not necessarily the one. Irushka always treats a new person very cautiously. She tempts his/her character. If a nanny's character is strong enough Irushka is polite, obedient and helpful. She addresses such a nanny tenderly "Dear nanny!" However if Irushka doesn't consider a new nanny's character very strong she calls her rather demandingly "Nanny!" Life gives out its own marks. The same with a child! I could break in on Irushka's relationship with a nanny and make it better when Irushka was unfair to her but again not directly but with the help of our diplomatic and warm mother. It happened quite often; you can get it from the book or feel it in all the elusive things. The main thing I paid attention to while working closely with nannies was the child's safety. Any psychological pressure on the child was prohibited. I presumed that genetically and culturally our child is a good one and all her pranks and bad behavior could be easily improved. One mustn't put pressure on a child or knock down her character. We've always wanted our daughter to grown up and become a real Personality and nothing less! Probably due to this Irushka's attitude towards me has developed in a rather flattering for me way: father is always right; he will protect and support. What else does a father need? Thereupon I remember one event which can be paraphrased "go through fire and water for somebody!" It was like this: one early winter morning in 2006 loud cries coming from the kitchen woke me up. I came into the kitchen and found angry Irushka and a confused nanny there. It turned out that both ladies saw a large sea bird gannet land on the kitchen window-sill, take a big plate of jellied meat with its huge yellow beak, strain, flap its wings and fly away to the sea. Irushka's anger was incredible. She yelled to the nanny: "Nanny, open the window, I'll jump out and fly to catch the bird; it took father's jellied meat!" Taking into account the fact that our flat is on a rather high floor I announced quite loudly and confidently that the bird had first arranged it with me that very plate of jellied meat would be given to the bird's children for breakfast. Everybody who was in the kitchen accepted my explanation and understood it correctly. Though I still don't know whether the bird managed to bring that plate to its children or not. On the following days our family doctor didn't bring us any bad news so I decided that the bird still managed to bring the plate to its children.

Well, it's almost impossible to describe a person's life so that it won't be just a boring description of every day trifling events or a lively description of true and fake heroic deeds. It's absolutely impossible to describe a little person's life. I don't know why I think of a claim I once came across that if a normal healthy adult moves like a child he will soon fall down feeling

exhausted. So this book about Irushka is probably just our grown up understanding and perspective of that part of Irushka's life, rather small I'm sure, that we – adults – managed to see, memorize and describe. After all we paid attention mostly to events, words and gestures. Many thoughts, feelings and discoveries passed by without our grown up apprehension and involvement though.

According to this I'd like to mention a few practical ideas.

How to choose and cooperate with a nanny. This is the most difficult problem which is impossible to order and which is similar to esoteric or alchemy in its difficulty. Every family chooses its own way to cooperate with a nanny, unfortunately through trial and error. It includes recruiting, legalizing relations, supporting relations and unavoidable parting with a nanny. In our case, mother used I'd say a "scientifically proven approach".

An official recruitment agency usually helped us to select a nanny; after that our mother held a personal interview with an applicant using a special form of 62 questions. Famous Ukrainian social scientist Dr. Valery Golovenko kindly agreed to help us to make it up after which our mother completed it rather creatively. I was left with the opportunity to look at an applicant with a fresh pair of eyes and estimate her. I must confess, meeting an applicant for a nanny position I first of all paid attention to basic personality traits such as an applicant's age, marital status and character traits that can be seen. Temper type is very important as a choleric person can't work with Irushka – two burning volcanoes can't stay together. An applicant should be neat and light-hearted, amiable and kind, have an attractive appearance and good health. An applicant shouldn't have any depressive living circumstances but be a type of person to share a foxhole with. The conclusion I came to after various tests wasn't really unique: the first impression of a person is the most accurate!

Relationship regulations meant first of all the establishment of "modus operandi" – which is a mother and nanny way of cooperation and distance between them and "modus vivendi" – which is a way of coexistence. Our mother, being in a way too sensitive took the relations with a nanny too personally at first. A nanny at the same time became an insider in the family – a person she should not have become because she started giving orders and advice. Only the eldest members of the family may behave like this, but not an employed person whose work though hard and responsible is still just a job. We came across such a situation pretty often probably because most nannies were older than our mother. They found it necessary to "teach" her. Our mother's personality trait let them do it too: she always tries to help everybody until she's woken up from her sweet dreams about our anything but simple world. Our mother can't demand anything or according to her own words "offend" anybody. Eventually the things straightened out. So a nanny didn't bring up only the child.

Irushka's perception of the world appeared and developed in front of our very eyes but we didn't notice new trends in her ideas and preferences at once being busy with our grown up problems. Once I discussed my Cossack origin with our mother and didn't pay attention that except her sitting and listening to me politely there was another personality for whom this new story of father's life can be a starting point for many thoughts. Yes, I proudly told our mother that I come from an ancient Cossack family of the Skvortsovs whose ancestors came from Zaporozhian Cossack Sich (Community) which by that time had already been abolished by Katherine II and then after spending some time in Poltava they moved to the precincts of Piatigorsk-city on the North Caucasus. They stayed at Cossack village of Goryachevodskaya which they had helped to found as my eldest relatives told me. It all happened before 1782 – the year when Piatigorsk was founded. The Skvortsovs served well, they were distinguished by the headmen and elected to be Cossack chieftains. While young the men from my family served in the Guard of His Majesty. My own mother told me all this. She kept silent about our origin up to 1985. During the

revolution she was orphaned as all the grown up men and their wives were persecuted for political reasons, or simply said they were killed by “internationalist soldiers” who were especially active in back areas of the civil war. The rest of our family (16 men) died during the WWII, mostly in the Moscow battle in 1941 fighting as soldiers of general Dovator’s cavalry division.

Irushka got interested in the Cossacks phenomenon; especially she wanted to know what father, who is so proud of his Cossack origin, thinks about the difference of Cossacks and ordinary people. It all ended up with Irushka’s idealization of Cossacks, or to be more exact of her own high status of a Cossack woman she told her friends loudly about while playing games. She tried to transfer her “uniqueness” to our family relations asking curious questions: “Father, is our mother a Cossack woman?” Father suspected nothing so answered honestly: “No, our mother is a Ukrainian who married a Cossack.” Irushka asked: “Has she become a Cossack, too?” Father’s reply: “No, she has been and follows to be a Ukrainian.” Irushka asked: “Am I a Cossack?” Father answered: “Yes, you are.” Irushka amplified her idea: “Father, have Cossacks always bossed around?” Father still unwitting but proud answered: “Yes, they have.” Irushka said: “Father, then tell to our mother to obey me because I’m a Cossack woman and she is not!” This was where father understood what kind of philosophy had just appeared. As you know it’s almost impossible to fight the ideas which possess even a small amount of people! Father being proud that Irushka showed leadership abilities didn’t even try to fight this new school of thought having decided that time would cure everything.

An issue of leadership abilities relating to a four-year-old child sounds a bit premature but I have always been amused with double standards little children are taught. Some behavior patterns don’t fit with the adult life, for example to share toys without a murmur, turn the other cheek contrary to logic. Though I guess lending toys in childhood and allowing credit of substantial sum of money as an admittedly loss loan are pretty different things. The thing probably is not in the bitter experience some people learn something from and other people don’t have such experience at all as the latter just don’t allow such loss loans at their sole discretion. So leadership as a character trait often noticed by nannies is just a claim for something which will or will not take place in Irushka’s adult life. Nevertheless, whenever Irushka is too rough I often tell her: “Irushka, a woman’s strength is in her weakness”. But then I add: “It’s in weakness that she shows.” After all what shall we teach our children and what codes shall bring them up? Shall we teach them something useful for their grown up life? Perhaps Ostap Bender had an answer because he had some principles but nevertheless claimed the following if my memory serves me right: “Principles are to be trespassed against, from time to time, otherwise what are they for?” But this sounds too conformist and not exactly appropriate. So what shall we teach our children and why shall we bring them up? It may all lie in those things that every person needs. Those things are quite plain: health, happiness, success, love, respect and support, recognition, welfare and something by choice. If we particularize this entire list it will sound like a classical Caucasian toast, however it may sure enough be what we call “a good and happy life”. It’ll be right to finish my introduction to a reader of this book with some important acknowledgements.

We are thankful to all Irushka’s nannies who taught our little daughter everything good and useful, who took care of her and made her life interesting and pleasant each in her own way. We are thankful to Tatiana Gorbenko who managed to decipher nannies’ diaries and prepare this quite long manuscript for further work.

We are thankful to Oleg Reshetnikov, our family friend and experienced psychologist whose advice I always follow not only in my professional life. I acknowledge love, respect and gratitude to our mother – Valentina Bondar born Braterskaya who gave life to our Irushka and who makes our life happy every day.

I hope this book will be interesting to those who don't look for a quaint plot but pay attention to plain and eternal things including the most important thing in the world that is love to own children. This book came into being as a materialized expression of parental life to our daughter Irushka.

One day she will also be an attentive reader of this book.

Dear readers, I wish you happiness in your children!

Alexander S. Bondar

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Yalta-Gurzuf



Valentina Bondar (born Braterskaya), mother of Irusha,
author of this book.

