

Natalya Zharikova
Widow of Sergei Magnitsky

Epilogue

They say that time heals all sorrows. Possibly. Well, I don't know. Almost five years have passed from the date of the arrest and four years since the death of Sergei Magnitsky, my beloved husband, wonderful father and son. They say it's been a long time and I need to calm down and move on, but I still remember with horror that terrible day, which divided our lives into "before" and "after", and I still keep thinking back to the tragedy that we experienced and continue to experience today. Sometimes I imagine the inhuman suffering and hardship that befell Sergei, but at the same time, I think that they are much worse than the imagination can possibly paint. I still find it hard to believe that this happened to my husband, that this happened to our family, and that this even happened in our time, in the 21st century! You try to appear strong, try to hold on, try not to show your feelings to your loved ones, in an effort to shield them from anxiety, but the pain, impotent rage and despair tears your soul apart even more...

Nalchik is a small, multi-ethnic, green town in southern Russia in the North Caucasus, and during our youth, it was a cosy little town. We spent our wonderful childhood and adolescent years in Nalchik. We went to the same school No. 4 in Nalchik and I became closely acquainted with Sergei in the ninth form, when we were, I think, 15. It was a wonderful time! As I understand now, the sweet memories of the school are in large part due to our dear teachers, particularly our young form master Janna Hazhesmilovna Unacheva. We had a very friendly class. The boys were a fine lot, they all studied well, and they all strived towards their goals, dreamt of succeeding in their adult life, but at the same time were cheerful and sociable. All this created a wonderful atmosphere in our lives, when there is a desire to run to school, learn, communicate with friends and

teachers, make friends, go out, arrange school parties, make roasted potatoes together, visit each other's homes for tea, and, of course, fall in love.

Certainly, Sergei Magnitsky stood out amongst all the other boys at school: an intelligent, well-read, talented, honest, smiling, young man with a great sense of humour, and very cute, he would become the soul of any party. Sergei was really a gifted and talented man. Mathematics and other sciences were very easy for him. Having solved a complicated problem from the school programme in his head, he could simply write the answer on the board - something which enthralled both the teacher and other students. Of course, Sergei participated in many school competitions and contests. I cannot say that everyone liked this student who had his own opinion on everything and was not afraid to express it openly, but his authority was recognised by classmates and teachers. Sergei loved to study. In the summer, when all the other kids were walking around all day long and having fun, he used to solve mathematics problems for his own pleasure, and in autumn brought a hefty writing book with answers. It's worth noting that Sergei loved to read from early childhood. I think it was a real passion, because he used to reach for a book at every opportunity. Naturally, Sergei graduated high school with great results and received a well-deserved award: a medal. At the graduation ceremony, when the whole school gathered, teachers, parents, students, and other people present greeted Sergei with applause, showing how much everyone loved and respected him.

After high school, Sergei entered what was then known as the Plekhanov Moscow Institute of National Economy, named after Marxist theoretician G.V. Plekhanov. As far as I know, he did well, studying easily and with pleasure, receiving a diploma with honours. I remained living and studying in Nalchik and for a while our paths diverged.

From the late summer to the early autumn of 1995, when Sergei was visiting Nalchik, we met again and realised that we had been wasting all these years, when we could have been really happy together. In the winter of that year, I moved to Moscow. We were completely happy our entire life together - all 13 years. Sergei was a perfect husband and a good father. Even with all his work commitments, he still made efforts to spend enough time with the children: to read a good book, take a walk in the park or around the Chistiye Prudy pond, watch a movie, show them his collection of stamps, or glue and paint a model of tank or aircraft.

Having a fondness for books since childhood, we certainly tried to promote a love of good literature to our children. We liked the forgotten tradition of family reading. I think family reading creates a comfortable home and helps to develop closer family relationships. Whenever we had a free evening, Dad would read the books of wonderful authors to our children such as: V.V. Mayakovsky, S.Y. Marshak, A.S. Pushkin, K.I. Chukovsky, A. Barto, N.N. Nosov, L.N. Tolstoy, Russian folk tales and fairy tales of the people of the world, I could go on forever with this list. Sergei would read very well, with expression and humour, and it was a pleasure to listen to him. And the whole family would gladly listen and ask him to read a little more, even though it was too late, and the kids had to go to bed...

Sergei loved family gatherings. On New Year, which we only ever celebrated at home, he would bake a huge goose with apples and potatoes. The dish always turned out to be fantastically delicious! Of course we would help him, but Sergei was the chef. In the evening we would gather around a large table and these were some of the most touching and memorable moments in our life!

I think that marital happiness is when you do not worry about anything in the long run, when everyone is healthy, when no external problems cause negative feelings in the family, when there is confidence in your future, when you're not alone, when you have someone to talk to, when you have someone with whom to share your thoughts and feelings, and you know that this person will always listen to you, understand you, and support you, and that you can respond in kind. When everything is fine, each new day is a holiday, your soul is cheerful, and there is a spark in your happy eyes. At such times we do not think about the time, we just live. Of course, there were minor troubles and disagreements in our family, but we solved all our family problems so quickly that they did not darken our lives. Often, people would not believe me that such an almost perfect family relationship could exist, that it is possible to love, cherish and respect each other for years, as if all of life is an endless "honeymoon", but I don't mind if they don't believe me. As one friend of mine once said: "You are happy, you had Sergei," and I replied: "I am happy, I have Sergei".

For more information about Sergei Magnitsky and
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