



Interview and Analysis

Life In The Soviet Union

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Life In The Soviet Union: Interview and Analysis

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Interview conducted with Natalya Volkova

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"Life In The Soviet Union" is neither a political nor ideological commentary. It is, rather, an unedited transcript of an interview conducted with my grandmother, Natalya Volkova, about her life during Soviet times. The whole interview contains memories of Natalya's childhood, teenage years, adulthood and retirement. The book also includes my own analysis of the interview as well as a life timeline, summarizing the book. "Life In The Soviet Union" should be interesting to those who are seeking an internal insight on how it was to live in the land of the Soviets.

Interview

Kristian: Ok, so I guess we'll start off with the first question, which is when and where were you born and how was your life as a child?

Natalya: Well, I was born in Russia, in the city of Omsk, which is located in Siberia. As for the date, I was born on March 30th, 1954, during the times of the Soviet Union. I had a regular working-class family with a mother, father, older brother and grandmother. I went to a regular Soviet school, and back then, our lives were overall very satisfactory. I mean, we were provided everything we needed by our country, including daycare, although me and my brother never really went there too often because our grandmother really liked to spend time with us. She really expanded our lives in terms of the things we did. We went with her to many places, like parks and stores as well as other cities, like the city of Tara, where our relatives lived. We also went to Crimea with her, where we were able to experience the sea. Other than travelling, we did a lot of other things with her, like getting taught to do different types of work.

She taught us to look after the chickens and other birds, work in the garden, differentiate different types of plants, make jam and many other skills. As I said, I was only 6 years old when I learned to do all these things and it was my grandmother who taught me them because my parents were mostly at work. I think that all these skills became very helpful in my life, especially things like sewing, which I was taught by grandmother and mom. And although most of the time my parents were at work, they still spent time with me when they could, often taking me to the circus. My dad would take us to various sporting events, like football and hockey events. The hockey events actually took place outside in the cold, though we quite liked it, probably even more than football. Other than sporting events, we also went to events that took place at my parents' workplaces, that were typically New Year themed with them focusing on a large New Year's tree, presents and themed games. Of course we had the same thing at school with the same New Year celebrations. There were actually a lot of different celebrations during the Soviet times, like May 1st, November 7th, Victory Day, Pioneer Day and others that we all celebrated. So I feel my life wasn't in any way bad back then.

I mean, even when I went to get a higher education it was great for me, as everything was free back then and you didn't have to pay for education. Then after finishing college, I went to study at an institute, then I went to work at a store, slowly getting a higher position. I started off as a regular worker, then got to assistant manager, then to manager and eventually to head of the whole store management. So unlike some other people who regret things in the past, I personally feel that I had a great life in terms of childhood and education and work.

Kristian: Yes, thank you for that and as for the second question, regarding specific information, what school did you go to exactly?

Natalya: You mean like the name of the school?

Kristian: Yeah, the name of the school.

Natalya: Well the school was named School #60, it was a very regular type school, where you could finish eight grades and then go to some sort of college, like your grandfather. You could also decide to stay in school and finish ten grades instead, then go to an institute.

So it was based on skills and future careers. After getting an education, it was very easy to apply for a job, especially if you were talented.

Kristian: Speaking of education, I'd like to know when and where you got your education and in what field?

Natalya: I don't really remember when I got it, but I do remember the college was called the Technical School of Soviet Trade. Then I went to an institute also called the Institute of Soviet Trade, which is now called the Trade and Economic University.

Kristian: Ok, for the fourth question, when did you get your first job and what was your experience with it?

Natalya: You know, actually I originally planned to get a medical job and even went to medical college after school, before the trade college. I studied three years in medical college and I mainly went there because my mom really wanted me to become a feldsher, like my grandfather.

So she always encouraged me to get a medical education because she really loved her dad and wanted someone to be like him. I decided to go because a lot of my friends went there and my mom would be happy. In reality, I actually enjoyed learning new things in medical college and enjoyed the theoretical aspect overall. Though after three years of studying, it came to us travelling to Buryatia and performing actual medical procedures, I understood that it was very difficult for me to handle sick people, both emotionally and physically. That is when I started rethinking my education and not seeing a medical servant as a viable profession, even though all my grades were high and I was about to receive my diploma, I made the decision to go to trade college and pursue something I had more interest in. After finishing three years of trade college and getting my diploma, I went to work as a merchandiser at a store and got my own division to work at, then I was given the position of assistant manager. When I finished the institute that I took after college, I got the position of manager. Finally, in the 90's I got the job of head of the store.

By that time, the store grew into a shopping centre and I was head of that as well. In the end, I ended up working in this one store for over 30 years.

Kristian: Very interesting. For the fifth question, when did you get married?

Natalya: I got married in 1972, when I was 18 years old and your grandfather was also 18 years old. This is exactly when I got into college.

Kristian: Alright. For the sixth question, was there any important life moments and events, unassociated with work.

Natalya: For me, important moments are when you get married and when you have children.

Kristian: Yes, you can tell me about when you had children.

Natalya: Well, we had our first daughter, Tatiana, the year after we got married, in 1973. Then we gave birth to your mom, Olesya, in 1981.

Other important events were our daughters participating in rhythmic gymnastics competitions and us supporting them along the way. Of course, there are more tragic life events like the death of a loved one, that I've experienced. But for happier life events, I could note us travelling to different places like forested areas where we had picnics and enjoyed the Irtysh River. I also travelled to different cities including Ulyanovsk, Kazan, Moscow, Saint Petersburg. So these are all things that were important in my life.

Kristian: Excellent! For the seventh question, what achievements and awards did you receive in your life?

Natalya: Your grandfather has a lot of different badges and pins that he received. But I personally received the award and title of Veteran of Labour. You normally get this title if you've worked for many years and if you worked well. It's given to you by the Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation.

Kristian: For the eight question, were there any notable dreams you had during your life?

Natalya: When I was younger, I had a dream of becoming a fashion designer. I had a passion for sewing and drawing new designs for clothes and I was even told that I was talented in doing it. Though now I understand it was all just a hobby.

Kristian: For the ninth question, what do you miss about your past?

Natalya: Probably, I miss a lot of my passed away relatives that I was close to, wishing that they were still with us.

Kristian: Well, those were all the questions. Thank you for taking your time with me. I really learned a lot more about you. This knowledge also expands the view of my country's history, especially since I love studying it.

Analysis

I decided to conduct this interview with my grandmother, Natalya, because, although I was born in the same country and city as her, there were still many things I wanted to know about her life, especially because she was born in a different time period. I started off by asking her about her early life and childhood. She was born on May 30th, 1954, in a Siberian city called Omsk in Russia. She was born into a family with parents, a grandmother and an older brother. She would mostly spend time with her grandmother as her parents were often at work. Her grandmother was very caring and loved doing things with her, such as teaching her to take care of animals and the garden, teaching her to sew, taking her places, like parks and stores and travelling to places like Tara and Crimea. When her parents were free, they would take her and her brother to the circus, football (soccer) games and hockey games. These descriptions of her childhood made me understand the close relationship she had with her grandmother.

It also gave a little insight on how life was like back in the Soviet Union. As her answer states, it was very easy to go to different events and travel to various places back then, probably due to it being all or mostly free.



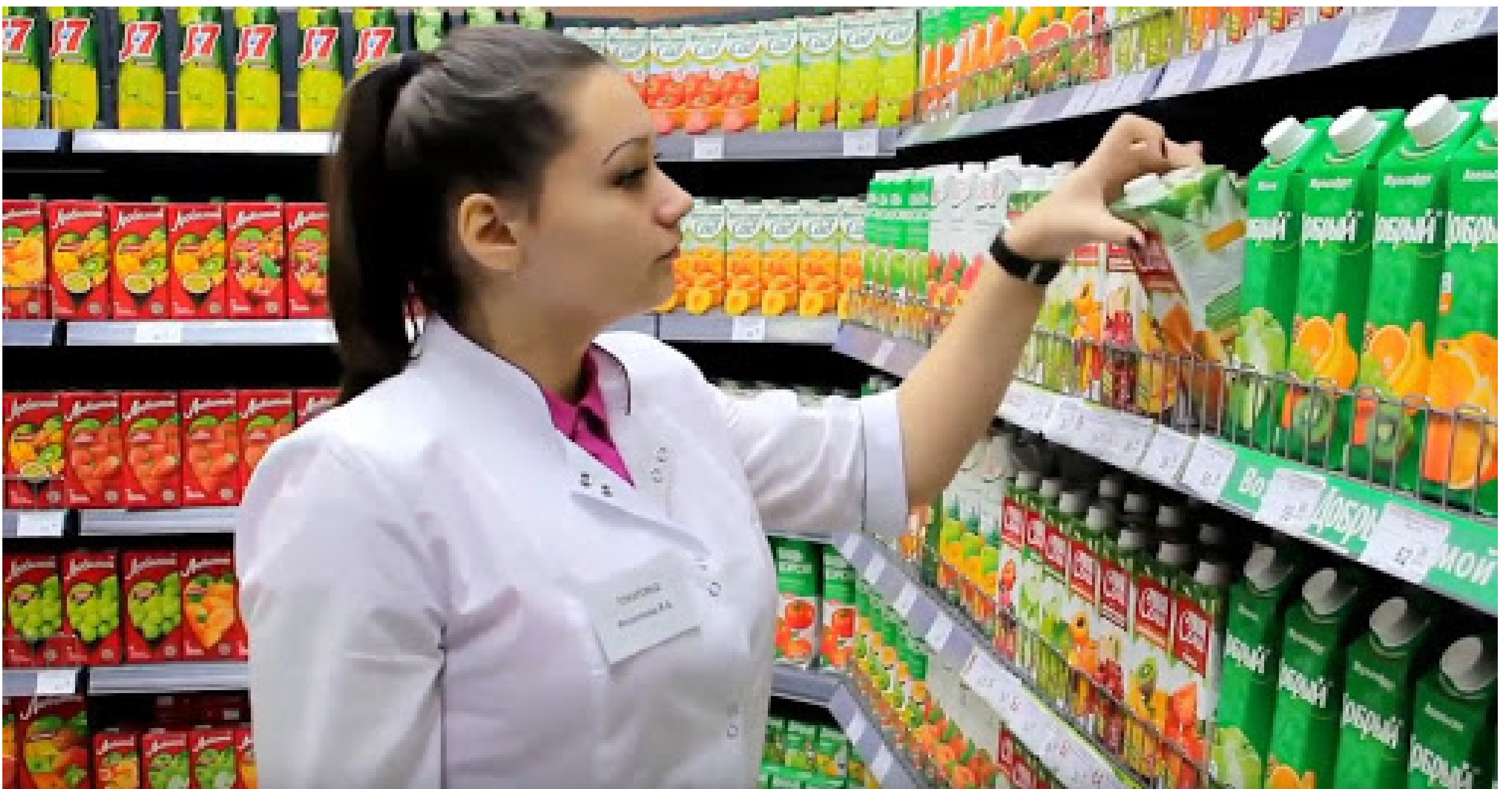
My second question focused on the school that she went to and how it was like going there. She went to a very regular type school, as she describes it, it was named School #60. The school often organized events that corresponded to different celebrations like May 1st, November 7th, Victory Day, Pioneer Day and, of course, New Year. New Year was by far the biggest celebration with there being a large New Year's tree, presents and games that were typically centered around the holiday. After finishing eight grades, one could go to study in college or continue their education in school until they finished 10 grades and go to some institute. After finishing college or university, it was very easy to apply for a job in Soviet times. This also expanded my view of the Soviet school system and how someone would graduate. It also seems that celebratory events were extremely popular in Soviet schools, especially when it came to New Year.



New Year celebration at a Soviet School (1979)

My grandmother then started explaining how her higher education went and what difficulties she faced. Originally, she was planning to get a degree in medical school as well as get a feldsher job. Her mom really wanted her to become a feldsher and finish medical school primarily because Natalya's grandfather was a feldsher and her mom wanted someone to follow his footsteps. Natalya agreed to enter medical college and study there for three years. She actually enjoyed studying medical theory and even had good grades. It was when she had to receive her diploma and travel to Buryatia for practical work, did she realize that medical work was not something she wanted to do for a living. Even though her grades were high and she already finished three years of school, she understood that it was going to be very difficult for her to withstand actual work, both physically and emotionally. As such, she made the decision of going into a trade college called the Technical School of Soviet Trade. After studying for three years there and receiving her diploma, she went into the Institute of Soviet Trade and started working as a merchandiser at a store at the same time.

After finishing the institute, she was given the positions of assistant manager and then manager at that same store. During the 1990's, she got her highest ranking job of head of store and would continue working at this position until her retirement. This explanation gave me so much information on her life and education. I saw that she wasn't sure on choosing her career originally but then became successful. She told me that she really felt comfortable and passionate when working at the store, which is probably what made her work at one store for over 30 years.



The next thing she told me about was when she got married. She got married to my grandfather, Vladimir in 1972 at the age of 18. She then started telling me more important life events and moments. They gave birth to their first daughter, Tatiana, in 1973. Then they gave birth to their second daughter, Olesya, in 1981. Natalya said that it was very valuable for her to see her daughters participating in rhythmic gymnastics competition and then gathering as a family to enjoy the Irtysh River. Aside from that, she travelled to a number of different cities like Ulyanovsk, Kazan, Moscow and Saint Petersburg. All of these important moments she told me about were definitely something undetachable from her, as she expressed lots of love for them. They also helped me understand how sports was important for her daughters and how she travelled to so many places across Russia. Another thing we discussed was how she was awarded the title of Veteran of Labour by the Ministry of Labour of the Russian Federation. Not everyone gets this title, only those who worked for very long and those who worked hard. It was interesting to know how she received this award and how it looked like.



Vetearan of Labour of the Russian Federation

One of the last things we looked at were dreams that she may have had before. Surprisingly, she actually had the dream to become a fashion designer when she was younger. She would even draw new styles of clothes and since she knew how to sew, she would sew many of the clothes. Eventually, she understood that this was more like just a hobby and nothing else. I was quite surprised to know this, since I've never heard her speak of this fact before. This just proves how a person can have many different interests, yet have one main interest as their career. Finally, I asked what she misses about her past. She replied that the only real thing she misses is her past away relatives, people that she wished were with her. This is pretty understandable as most people would miss their relatives. Overall, she said that she has no regrets in her life and that her life back then was very satisfactory. In conclusion, I was able to gain much insight on the life of my grandmother and life during the Soviet Union. I can say that there were many things different back then, especially in terms of getting an education, a job and travelling.

Life Timeline



Was Born

Born on May 30th, 1954 in the city of Omsk, Siberia, Russia.

Image: View of the city of Omsk from above



Went To School

Went to School #60 and finished ten grades.

Image: Photo of School #60 in winter



Went To Medical College

Went to medical college and studied for three years to become a feldsher before changing fields.

Image: Picture of a feldsher



Got Married

Got married in 1972, at the age of 18.

Image: Natalya Volkova with her husband Vladimir Volkov



Went To The School Of Trade

Went to the Technical School of Soviet Trade and studied for three years. Then received her diploma.

Image: Photo of the Technical School of Soviet Trade (now the Economic and Commercial College)



Gave Birth To First Child

Gave birth to her first daughter, Tatiana in 1973.

Image: Tatiana, Natalya's daughter



Went To The Institute Of Trade

Went to the Institute of Soviet Trade and got her diploma.

Image: Photo of the Institute of Soviet Trade (now the Trade and Economic University)



Got Her First Job

Natalya got her first job as merchandiser in a store while she was still in university.

Image: Picture of a merchandiser



Gave Birth To Second Child

Gave birth to her second daughter, Olesya in 1981.

Image: Olesya, Natalya's daughter



Got Her Highest Job Position

Got the position of head of the store in the 90's.

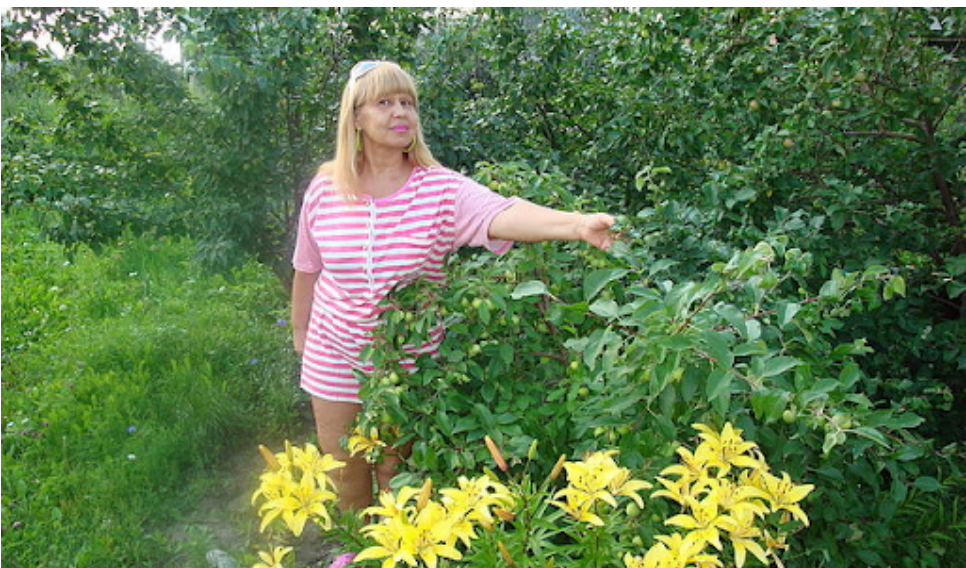
Image: Photo of a store in Russia



Received The Title Of Veteran

Received the title of Veteran of Labour for her work that she did for over 30 years.

Image: The Veteran of Labour official document



Present Day

Natalya is currently 65 years old and is still living in Omsk with her husband. She has many grandchildren.

Image: Natalya at her dacha (Russian cottage)



Image: Natalya with her husband and two of her childhood friends



Thank you for reading "Life In The Soviet Union"