

Family Life in Russia Mostly Spent Looking Into the Television Set, Too

Editor's Note: When Eddy Gilmore, long-time AP bureau chief in Moscow, returned to this country, he was asked what a Russian family was like, what sort of teaching the children have, how its life compares with that of an American family. Here are his recollections, a graphic story of a single family group, which spends a lot of time looking at television.

By EDDY GILMORE
NEW YORK (AP) - Life for the average Russian family is getting better - but not much better. I mean it is still very tough by Western standards. To be perfectly frank, I should point out that my contact with average - or any other kind - of Russians has not been exactly chummy for the last years.

Lost Russian Friends
Not since the Soviet Union clamped on the security decrees and I lost most of my Russian friends. Or just stayed away because to see these would mean trouble. Trouble for them.

However, you don't live 11 years in a country without knowing quite a bit about its people. That plus the fact that I have a Russian wife who, thank heavens, is in the United States with me, has given me some license, I suppose, to write on this subject. Let's take a family that I know something about.

Two Sons in War
The husband is 62, the wife 51. They have two sons and one daughter. The two sons were in the war. The father and the mother and the daughter all work. Both sons are married, the younger for the third time.

The eldest son has two children. He is a card-carrying Communist, a foreman in a factory that makes tin cans. He gets an overall salary of 2,100 roubles a month. This would not mean much if you translated it into dollars at the official rate of four Soviet roubles to one U.S. dollar. It's better to compare it against prices.

Four Live Together
This son has a wife and two children. The wife does not work. One of the children is old enough to go to school. The four of them live in a two room apartment. They have no automobile. Not even a bicycle. But they do have a combination television-radio-phonograph. They watch the television a lot of the time. The set cost 2,500 roubles when it was new. Sets are a little cheaper now.

No Telephone
Rents on crowded old apartments such as this are fantastically cheap. So are utilities. But he needs all the roubles he makes, because food, clothing and other essentials are expensive. For those who can afford it, rents on new apartments are much higher - up to 500 roubles a month, I heard.

For the two-room apartment this husband pays 40 roubles a month. Electricity is about 20 roubles. Gas is about 6. He has no telephone. He shares a bathroom with three other families and his

Lost Bomber Found; Entire Crew Alive
CHURCHILL, Man. (AP) - A Canadian Air Force Lancaster bomber missing for a week was found Saturday by one of an armada of search planes which had crisscrossed 65,000 square miles of desolate northern tundra. First reports said all eight crew members survived.

The RCAF announced that the downed plane was located at 3 p.m. 192 miles northwest of this Hudson Bay port. Another Lancaster made the discovery.

An Otter seaplane has left Churchill for the scene and may try to evacuate survivors.

wife shares a kitchen stove with three other wives. The daughter who goes to school pays no tuition fee, but it costs about eight roubles a week for a hot lunch every day. When the wife had her children she paid no doctor's fee or hospital bill. When the children are ill she takes them to a clinic. If they were desperately ill she could telephone for a doctor. He would come - eventually - but not necessarily right away. The doctors have too much to do.

Simply Shows Up
The wife had no trouble giving birth to the two children. She simply showed up at the maternity home, was put in a room with three other waiting women. When the pains got almost unbearable she told one of the nurses. Then she walked into another room. Three or four other women were also there, all having labor pains. They had their babies together with kindness and sympathy from the nurses and the doctors. But with nothing to ease the pain or help pass the time.

Much Homework
The girl who now is in school goes six days a week. She shows up at 8 in the morning for classes that begin at 8:15. Three days a week she remains until 1:30 p.m. The other three days she leaves at 12:30. She has a lot of homework. It takes from two to three hours to prepare this every day.

I don't know what her course is going to be like under the new government of Georgi Malenkov and others. But under Joseph Stalin's regime she heard a lot about Joseph Stalin, and the Communist Party. She heard how the school she was attending (with 41 other girls in the class) was better than any school in any foreign country.

Just Rich Children
She was told - and her mother and father were told - that six million children her age were unable to go to school in the United States because the states and the government did not provide for all the children. Just the children of rich Americans went to school. They heard this over and over again.

At school they were given what was described as an accurate picture of race relations in the United States. It was described as a good book on the subject. It was called "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

However, on this subject of schools I believe that in fairness to a certain Russian school teacher I should relate what happened when our now 9-year-old daughter, Vicki, went to a Russian school. "Amerikana" It was located in the same neighborhood in which we lived. On the second day several girls called her an "Amerikanka." This means an American, female variety. Our daughter told us nothing about it, but the teacher did. She said she heard about it and promised there would be no repetition of the incident. The term, I should add, was applied with derision by two girls who had heard how American soldiers were "torturing Korean children."

The incident was never repeated and Vicki was never reminded at school that she had a horrible, beastly American for a father. For this, I presume, she was thankful. Very Nice Russian Children I cite this case to point out that there are some very nice Russian children and very nice Russian people.

But let's get back to that typical Russian family. The daughter is about 22. She is not married and has no children. I make the distinction because quite a few Russian women have children who are not married. Not Encouraged by State The state doesn't encourage this, but it treats the mother and the child just the same as it treats a mother with a husband and a child with a father. If the state can prove the identity of the father - and it usually can - he has to share the child's upkeep.

But this young Russian woman has no child and has never had one. For this she pays a tax of about 160 roubles a year. I mean for not having a child.

Had Three Children
If she had a child and no husband she would not pay the tax. However, I doubt if anyone willfully goes out and has a child just to escape the childless tax. If she had three children she would get a small payment of money. When she had a fourth she would get even more. The more children she had the more money she'd get for having them. When she had her tenth she could glory in the title of "Mother Heroine." She'd be given a badge and a hatful of roubles.

The Russians, I believe, borrowed this idea from Mussolini. In any case, there is heavy emphasis on building up big families and birth control is frowned upon with the same Communist severity as American capitalism. Russian women, incidentally, try to practice birth control. At least a lot of them do. Life is difficult in the U.S.S.R., and another child makes it more difficult.

Wife Couldn't Help
I know of Russian women who have appealed to my wife, and other Russian women I know, to assist them in this problem. For obvious reasons, my wife could not help them. Now, as to the other son. He's just out of prison. His term was not a long one and, looking at it from one angle, I suppose he brought it on himself.

He kept indulging in the national fireworks, vodka, and every time he did it he would sound off on the subject of Stalin Communism. He didn't like it. He added that when he was a soldier in the West during the war and immediately thereafter, things looked pretty good to him.

Receives Three Years
He received a three year sentence at hard labor for this. Had he not been drunk when he voiced such sentiments his sentence, unquestionably, would have been longer. Russians are tolerant of drunks. He got out of jail when the Malenkov government ordered an amnesty shortly after it took over. The mother of this family, as I have pointed out, is now a grandmother. She has been working at the same textile factory since she came to Moscow 27 years ago from a village in the Tula Oblast.

Salary 800 Roubles
Her salary is 800 roubles a month, less certain taxes. She works about eight hours a day, six days a week. But if the factory lags in its monthly plan then she often works a 10 or even 12 hour day toward the end of the month. She did this under the Stalin regime. Since Malenkov had been in power her factory had not had to contribute extra hours to help the director hit his production target.

There is considerable grumbling among the workers, but there is little they can do. They have labor unions in Russia. But they don't have strikes. Definitely not. **Father Has Trouble** And now for the father of this family. His name is, let's say, Sergei, because it isn't Sergei. Sergei, in common with a lot of other people, has serious objections to

male labor in any form. He's had some trouble with his factory over the years because of this. He's been docked pay. He's been denounced and he's been threatened with a jail sentence for dogging on the job, showing up late, cutting corners, and sometimes sneaking home a little early.

But Sergei is a wily operator. He can sail very close to the wind - the party-state discipline wind - and never lose his job. Like so many Russians he has tremendous charm, is a marvelous drinking companion and can tell - and enjoy - a good story.

Shakes Head
When his son got that prison sentence for denouncing Stalin Communism, Sergei shook his head. "That would never happen to me," he sighed. "I might have said that Stalin was a bastard. But I'd have said he was a wonderful one."

Just before I left Moscow, I ran into the old rascal on the street. After a quick exchange of pleasantries, I asked him what he thought all the new gestures from the new regime meant. "I don't know yet," he whispered, "but I'll say one thing. If they start giving a little away, they better watch out. The people have gone too long without many things. If they give a little, they may be forced into giving a lot." I almost didn't ask the next question. "There may be another revolution?" I asked. "Not the kind you mean," he said. "But the people are tired. We want to rest. Rest from a lot of things. There are all sorts of revolutions."

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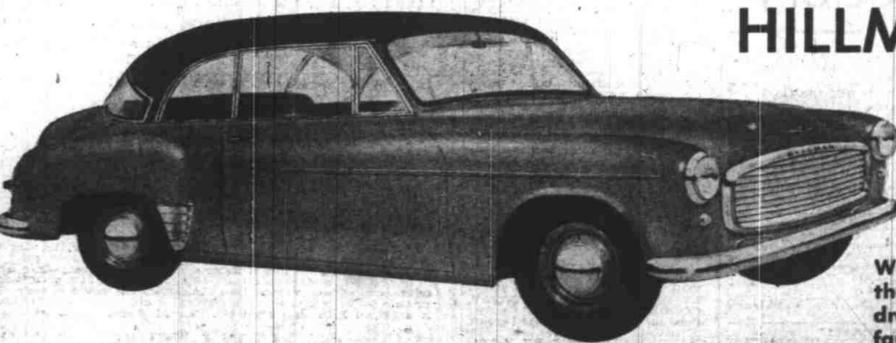
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