

# "Very Domestic And Loving, And Such Good Fun To Live With"

In this article, adapted from "London Calling,"  
PEARL BINDER,  
a well-known artist, recalls a happy holiday in  
Moscow when she stayed with an ordinary  
working-class family

I SHOULD like to tell you about the Russian family I lived with at one time when I was in Moscow. I can only give you my personal impression, but they were, I think, typical of ordinary working-class families. Anyhow, this family wasn't famous and distinguished in any way, but very domestic and loving and such good fun to live with.

They lived in a small flat on Pokrovka, a lively and popular main street of Moscow. Like so many other Moscow families they had come to the capital from the provinces, in their case from Odessa, and they clung stubbornly to their own local dishes. Just as a Lancashire woman will insist on hot-pot when she lives in London so my family served

salt herring, boiled potatoes, and cranberry salad for breakfast every day.

## They Were Six

There were six in the family, seven with me. First of all grandma (or babushka as they called her) who had lost her husband in the civil war. She was still in her forties, and full of vigour, a tiny rosy creature with sparkling dark eyes and a smile full of cunning. She did most of the cooking (and what a lot there was with those terrific Russian appetites to satisfy) and ruled everybody. Then there was her elder son, Michael, or Misha, who was my special friend because he knew a little English. Misha was a tremendous fellow, blond and brawny and very proud of his biceps. He was a sailor in the Red Fleet, and a specialist in searchlights. He was twenty-five years old. The second son, Brosi, was

a shy quiet lad of eighteen. He was a chauffeur by trade and loved his lorry passionately, especially when there was engine trouble and he had to get underneath and tinker about with the machinery. But he also loved books and was often to be found in a corner, oblivious of everybody, deep in a volume of Chekhov or Dostoevsky. He had read what English books he could in translation and spoke enthusiastically of Jack London and Charles Dickens.

## An Air-Minded Family

The third of the family was the only daughter, Irina, a strapping handsome girl of twenty-two, always gay as a bird and quite able to hold her own physically with her tough brothers. Irina loved sports and had passed her final tests for sharpshooting with a rifle, swimming and jumping. She was learning parachute jumping and hoped presently to start learning to fly. Actually her husband, whose name was Alexander and whose pet name was Sasha, was a pilot in the Red Air Force. He was intelligent and hard-

working and was making rapid progress. Misha regarded him with pride and longed to emulate him, but he wasn't clever enough and couldn't bear to sit studying all the evening when the snow was crisp for skiing or the ice perfect for skating.

Last of all came Irina's little son, the idol of the family, Leonid or Leonka. He had golden curls, and the face of a cherub, but he was very tough and as naughty as all healthy boys of two and a-half. His mother and father were already making him air-minded by teaching him to jump into their arms from chairs, then tables, then quite high cupboards. He loved this and shrieked with delight as he took a header in the air; whilst grandma of course looked on in a panic and said what was this generation coming to, and that her adored husband had only once travelled in a train and then he hadn't liked it much.

## Irina's Birthday Party

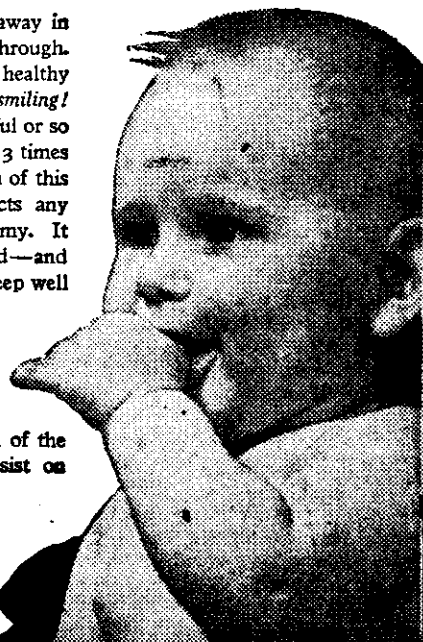
Russians are very sociable and very fond of parties. The happiest day I

(Continued on next page)

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