

HOW WE LEARNED ABOUT HAPPINESS

By Lidia Evgenevna Shmakova

During perestroika, life was terribly hard, and our family was falling apart. Then we met the missionaries, and slowly we began to rebuild.

I always thought we had a strong family. Our three boys and two girls were normal children, and we had normal problems with them. Sometimes when they would act up, I would get angry. Later I would think to myself, “Why did you get so mad at them?”

I didn’t know then that *perestroika*—a period of political and economic change—was beginning in Russia. I didn’t know that goods would disappear from the shelves of all the stores, that for months and later for years, we would not receive paychecks. Life became very difficult. We had struggles, and my husband and I were on the brink of divorce.

There came an epidemic of drug use, and one of our sons got involved. It

seemed that the sun didn’t shine in our windows anymore. I didn’t know whom to pray to, but still I asked God for help. We fought with all our strength, and little by little we pulled out of this bog.

In the summer of 1998, missionaries found us. Our lives changed 180 degrees as we headed in a new direction. Within five years we had attended the temple and had been sealed as a family for eternity.

When our middle son served a full-time mission in the Czech Republic, he wrote to us in every letter, “Stay firm and faithful. Together we are the happiest family.” Even my friends would tell me I must be the happiest woman in the world to have so many children and grandchildren and to know I will never be plagued with loneliness.

Looking back, I realize that like the people who heard King Benjamin, our family experienced a mighty change in our hearts, becoming children of Christ (see Mosiah 5:7). It was a huge

transformation for me. Before becoming a Latter-day Saint, when I thought about death, an unbearable grief gripped my heart and soul. It took every bit of strength I had to repel those thoughts from me. Now I have peace in my soul.

I’ve learned that happiness comes in different forms. It can be found in the blackest thunderclouds or when the earth is withering from heat. It is also in the warm rays of the sun in the midst of pouring rain. It is in the first green leaf of spring peeping out of the cracked bud of a poplar tree. It is in the little white petal working itself out on a branch of an apple tree. It is in the darkness of the night sky with thousands of twinkling stars. It is in the tender look of a loved one. It looks out through shining eyes in family photographs.

Happiness also comes to me when I do something good for someone else. It warms my soul with a gentle flame when I pray to our Heavenly Father. Sometimes, when I think I want something more, I remember that I need to learn to value what I have—the Lord Himself gave it all to me. ■

