**STARS NEVER FADE**

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Kherson is the birthplace of a gifted gymnast, ‘a true goddess of gymnastics’ as she was called. This year it turns 82 years since one of the most titled sportswomen in the world was born. So, who is she?

Half-starved, badly dressed, living in an unheated flat Larisa Latynina dreamt about ballet. Her Mother, who loved her daughter deeply, enrolled her kid in a choreographic course at the House of Folk Art. Pelageya Anisimovna worked as a cleaner by day and as a stocker by night. She got only 225 rubles per month – 50 of these went to pay for her daughter’s dance classes. Larisa looked forward to every ballet lesson as if for a celebration. However, the studio was closed soon. It was the collapse of all Larisa’s dreams. She cried with the rest of the girls because they all got into the spirit of choreography. They saw themselves as future ballerinas.

In childhood emotional wounds heal quickly. Gradually, ballet seemed to become distant and forgotten in young Larisa’s mind. And then one day – through the glass door of Kherson school № 14 – Larisa saw the gym where girls were doing exercises to the music. She was so delighted with what she saw: it looked like ballet! She rushed to the coach, Mikhail Sotnichenko, immediately. The future champion asked him to take her on, but there was an overpowering obstacle: Larisa could not join because she had school in the evenings (with too many students attending the school she studied at there were morning and evening academic shifts).

It took a while for the dream to come true. In the fifth form Larisa attended school in the mornings. And when she celebrated her twelfth birthday she crossed the threshold of the gym to start her first training. Pelageya Anisimovna’s daughter was enrolled in a section only on one condition that the training sessions should not interfere with the girl’s studies.

Larisa didn’t let the coach and her mother down. She finished school with a gold medal and won the USSR championship among schoolchildren. After the gold medal Larisa was awarded the badge of the Master of Sports of the USSR.

Mikhail Sotnichenko felt if Larisa stayed in Kherson her talent would languish and fade away. Moreover, he had given her everything he knew and could. With his blessing she moved to Kiev, taking the first step in the history of world sport.

No matter how popular Larisa was, she never forgot who was the first to open the doors of the world of sport to her. In 2002 the famous gymnast visited Kherson in order to commemorate Mikhail Sotnichenko’s ninetieth Birthday. When a journalist asked her what she felt, she said: “Here I grew up, studied, cried and laughed. And here appeared a tender feeling in my heart…”

**Based on: *«Зірки ніколи не згасають» by Skorohod A.N.***

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