**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 marks 82 years since one of the most titled sportswomen in the world was born. So, who is she?

Half-starved, badly dressed, and 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 made 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 it were a celebration. However, the studio was soon closed. It was the collapse of all Larisa’s dreams. She cried with the rest of the girls because they had 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 where she studied, there were morning and evening academic shifts).

It took a while for her 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 on the condition that the training sessions would not interfere with the girl’s studies.

Larisa didn’t let the coach nor 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 taught her everything he could. With his blessing she moved to Kiev, taking her first step into the history of world sports.

No matter how popular Larisa was, she never forgot who was the first to open the doors of the world of sports to her. In 2002 the famous gymnast visited Kherson to commemorate Mikhail Sotnichenko’s ninetieth birthday. When a journalist asked her how 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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