



Raisa Tonkonogy

December 25, 1926 - February 5, 2023

Raisa Tonkonogy was born on December 25, 1926. Her father Ephim Bravarnik was born in England, became a mechanical engineer, and came to Russia before the revolution where he met his love Gitta Aybinder. The couple had two sons, Solomon and Zahar, and daughter Raisa. They moved to Baku in early 1930's, which saved their lives as many Aybinders became victims of the Holocaust. Raisa lived in Baku until immigrating to the United States.

In 1951, Raisa graduated from Azerbaijan Oil and Gas University as a Chemical Engineer and made her career as a leading Hydro-Reclamation Engineer at the Irrigation Design Institute "Azgiprovodhoz".

In college, Raisa met Mikhail Tonkonogy, a young man studying Electrical Engineering after fighting for 7 years on the front lines of World War II. They got married on October 12, 1953, and lived together beautifully and amicably for almost 50 years until Mikhail's passing on June 15, 2003.

Raisa and Mikhail had their only child, daughter Rena. They lived the life of their daughter, taking her to study in all possible schools and hobby groups. At the same time, Raisa and Mikhail managed to read all the latest books, never missed a premiere in theaters and cinemas, and traveled a lot throughout the Soviet Union.

Rena got married to Oskar Karash, son of Eduard and Ivetta Karash. Oskar became a much-loved son-in-law. The first grandchild, Ilya Karash, was born, followed seven years later by a new baby girl, Alla Karash. Raisa retired to be with grandkids full time. Grandparents played a big role in grandkids' everyday life, admiring their many interests in science, music and sports. With Ilya and Alla partaking in ballroom dancing, Raisa was busy making costumes and attending all their performances.

The big change in Raisa and Mikhail's comfortable life in Baku was the decision to immigrate to the United States together with Rena, Oskar, and kids. To make it possible, Mikhail retired, and they left the Soviet Union in 1989.

The immigration was smooth, but not easy. Raisa or Mikhail never complained of anything, quite the opposite – they found joy in exploring new places, adapting to a new life, and finding new friends. Raisa was amazing making their new life in Houston as nice as ever. Always with a smile and in a good mood, she learned English, made a lot of new Russian, American and Yiddish-speaking friends, and was active in social life. For years she was the president of the Russian club, and a member of the Veterans of World War II committee. Raisa was fluent in Yiddish and became a member of the Yiddish club. When a new Holocaust Museum opened in Houston, Raisa was invited by her friend Anna Steinberger to become one of its first volunteers. Raisa translated the Holocaust Museum welcoming brochure into Russian.

Raisa and Mikhail traveled a lot. They visited many European countries, Israel, Canada, Mexico, and Russia, either by themselves or together with Rena, Oskar, and the kids.

Raisa was very proud of Ilya becoming a computer science executive and Alla becoming a founder of an immigration law firm.

Ilya married Inna Shaposhnikova, and Alla married Scott Nowowiejski. Both weddings were celebrated on the same day with guests from all 3 families and 3 generations. At the reception Raisa surprised everybody with a wonderful toast for the newlyweds in English. Four awesome great-grandsons were born, Michael, Daniel, Samuel, and Ezra. Raisa's joy and happiness had no end. Now she was participating in great-grandkids lives, loving, and adoring them.

Raisa was an incredible person, wonderful wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, great-grandmother, sister, and aunt. She lived a long, beautiful, and joyful life, surrounded by loving people. Raisa will forever remain in our hearts and may her memory be a blessing.

A graveside service was held on Friday, February 10, 2023 at Emanu El Memorial Park, 8341 Bissonnet, Houston, Texas, 77074.

Cemetery Details

Emanu El Memorial Park

8341 Bissonnet St
Houston, TX 77074

Previous Events

Graveside Service

FEB 10. 2:30 PM (CT)

Emanu El Memorial Park
8341 Bissonnet St
Houston, TX 77074