

Today's Martyrs – Lida and Aaron Vashchenko



When Lida Vashchenko adopted her son Aaron on April 23, 1975 she took him into her arms and said all of the wonderful things that mothers say to their sons. One phrase that passed her lips surprised her, though: “The whole world will find out about you”. She asked herself, “Why did I say that?”

This essay is dedicated to that purpose. It would be completely understandable if you, dear reader, were not able to finish reading this account, but please try.

Lida Vashchenko was the eldest of 13 children in a family of Baptists in Chernogorsk, Russia led by her parents Peter and Augusta. She had spent several years with two of her sisters in what amounted to a reform school after the state had taken them away in an attempt to convert them to atheism. They failed and eventually allowed them to return home. In May 1968 the family made their second attempt to emigrate to the West: they attempted to enter the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, but were detained. Lida was 17. Her interrogator threatened her with a revolver; her response was simple: she stared back and said “Kill me”. Both of her parents were sentenced to labor camps at the same time, a highly unusual punishment in the 1960's, and Lida along with her grandparents became the head of the family for a few years.

Seven years later her parents had both returned home. Lida had taken a job at a maternity clinic. Across the street was the local abortion clinic. Babies who had survived late-term abortions would be brought to the maternity clinic and left to die. Lida often was given the task of disposing of the remains.

On March 31, 1975 a baby who had survived an abortion was brought over. Days went by and he did not die, despite neglect and medical experimentation (a doctor kept poking him with needles). Lida named him Aaron. After some days she decided to track down his biological mother and ask her permission to adopt Aaron. She readily agreed. Lida had all of the proper paperwork completed and became Aaron's adoptive mother. In retaliation for her attention to Aaron, the maternity clinic refused to allow him to go home and continued to neglect him. In the end Lida felt she had no choice but to bring Aaron home without an official release.

Doctors came to the Vashchenko home to demand Aaron's return. Lida refused. She resigned her position with the clinic and took Aaron to live at friends. The police began surveillance on the Vashchenko home. Aaron rallied and grew, the chemical burns from his abortion faded. Eventually, though, they had to return home.

Their home was raided on July 17. The police arrived with social workers and the biological mother. They called to Lida with appeals to surrender Aaron to his biological mother who so missed him. The biological mother kept staring at the ground and spoke only when prompted by the social workers. Lida and her sister

Nadya barricaded themselves in the sturdy Siberian house, while her sister Vera stayed outside in an attempt to passively prevent the police from scaling the fence or forcing the gate. Of course they eventually gained entry. They ripped a window out of its frame, climbed in, and forced Lida to let go of Aaron by twisting her free arm until she nearly passed out. The officer then carried the crying baby by one leg, as if he were a trussed bird bought from a meat grocer. He handed him to his biological mother who then carried him the same way, and the raiders drove off.

On August 24 the Vashchenko family traveled by train to pick wild berries for winter preserves. On the ride home that night they all felt as if some great force of fear and evil were pressing down on them, and they prayed until it passed. They later found out that was the exact moment that Aaron died, reportedly 'in surgery', though he needed none when he was taken. Lida was heartbroken when finally told the truth on September 18.

Early on September 19 the Vashchenko family entered the local cemetery and without permission exhumed Aaron's body. They followed the tradition of all Russian Christians and held a prayer vigil all night over his casket; in a fitting coincidence somber music was heard from a Russian language Christian shortwave radio station in South Korea that night. Aaron was buried in the family plot in the morning. The authorities remonstrated but did not dare to execute their threats. A family member (possibly Lida's father) later said of Aaron and his martyrdom:

“His torments were undergone for God because he ended up in a family of believers and had it been a family of non-believers, then he would have lived and grown up. From this it follows that he bore his sufferings for God, although he was unconscious of this fact because he was still a baby. He will inherit eternal life among the first born. Those who abducted him do not believe in life beyond the grave, but their victory was in this life only. The devil has suffered complete defeat”

Aaron Vashchenko died because the Soviet state found it intolerable that a young Christian woman with an irregular education could love and nurture a child that it did not want. We should remember Aaron and Lida whenever we are tempted to follow any scheme to save the world which lacks room for the Savior Himself.

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