

# **And Every Time I look at these Photographs I feel a Sense of Joy**

Anna Kligman

John Peter Askew. This man appeared in my life when I was some 11 years old. An Englishman came to our family. It was a very unusual event for that time. And we all looked upon John as if he were from a different planet. He seemed so funny! Like a big child. Since then, John has periodically appeared in the life of our family. He does not speak Russian. But something draws him here. He has seen so much in Russia: endless roads, untouched forests, mountain streams, remote villages with their original way of life, and very interesting people. The only thing he has not yet seen is a bear! And all that he sees, he captures with his camera. Many are surprised that he uses a film camera in our modern times. Such is the strange Englishman. What is most unexpected is his photographs. It is difficult to say what they are – beautiful or not beautiful, successful or not successful. One is reminded of Pushkin's words: 'There is the Russian spirit . . . there it smells of Rus!'. Yes, it is amazing how well these photographs grasp the essence of (Russian) people! (Although nature has no nationality of course). A multitude of elements constitute every picture. Each is a story of time, of life, of people and their identity... Each story conveys priceless, profound feelings of life that words cannot express. It contains life itself! And now I ponder: 'Who is this man? Who is this John Peter Askew?' The one who is writing my story now, who appears, then disappears. It is an exciting, interesting and even mystical sensation, to know that there is such an observer to your life. To be part of this process is very valuable to me. And every time I look at these photographs I feel a sense of joy, seeing how beautiful life is in every moment! This is a great gift!

**Anna Kligman** (nee' Chulakov) is a member of the Chilakov family, who has lived in the city of Perm, Russia throughout her life. This is her own personal testimony about the genesis of *We* over three decades of her families life.

This text, including the original written in Russian, was included in the book *We* published by Kerber Verlag in 2019 to accompany John Peter Askew's exhibition at the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK.