

## TEACHER FREED FROM JAIL BUT MUST LEAVE U.S. IN MONTH

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### **Body**

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Yana Slobodova came home from jail Tuesday night, but it is a bittersweet and temporary reprieve.

The Russian piano teacher was detained and had been held in an Oakland jail for nearly three weeks because she was living in the United States without authorization. Slobodova could have been deported without the chance to say goodbye to her 20-month-old son, Nikita, and her husband, Alexander Makarchuk. But in order to gain freedom for 30 days, Slobodova promised immigration officials she would not appeal her case any further and to leave the United States by Feb. 27.

"I'm just happy to be out, to tell you the truth," said Slobodova, who arrived in the country in 1996 with improper papers. "I'm probably going to be shocked later, upset later, but for now I'm just happy to see my baby and my husband."

Makarchuk, a U.S. citizen, is still seething. "I feel mad at the government because they made her sign away her rights" to keep appealing her case. If Slobodova had not agreed to the conditions of her release, she might have been deported to Russia without seeing her family.

While a direct appeal to immigration officials is off the table, Makarchuk said the family will try asking for help from various branches of the federal government: California's congressional delegation, the Department of Homeland Security and Vice President Dick Cheney.

Slobodova, who lives in San Francisco, is from St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1996, while she was single, she entered the United States with documentation stating that she was the wife of a U.S. citizen. Slobodova has since admitted to misrepresenting herself to immigration officials, but she and her husband contend that she was also the victim of fraudulent immigration consultants who gave her the wrong paperwork. Slobodova said she paid \$10,000 to immigration consultants, who convinced her she could gain permanent residency based on her extraordinary musical ability.

Upon arriving in the United States, Slobodova began a lengthy process of seeking asylum. She married Makarchuk, a naturalized citizen, in 1999. Her parents successfully sought refugee status as Russian Jews and now live in San Mateo. They helped post Slobodova's \$10,000 bond from jail this week.

The much-beloved teacher taught private piano lessons at a performing arts school in San Francisco and at the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View. Dozens of students, parents and friends have written letters to immigration officials attesting to Slobodova's character and the hardship to her family that her deportation would cause.

Makarchuk has no plans to move to Russia. He hopes to find a cheaper apartment for himself and Nikita, and Slobodova is looking up acquaintances in St. Petersburg, where she earned a master's degree at a conservatory.

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Makarchuk can later make another attempt to gain permanent residency for his wife. Beyond that, the family said, it is hard to picture the future.

"I love the city," said Slobodova, who lives in San Francisco. "I have a healthy baby and everything was going so well for me. It's very hard to lose all this.

"Being locked up for so long makes you think how much you take for granted. It's about time to say thank you for everything. I'll call and see a lot of people. Thirty days seems maybe like a long time, but it's not."

## Notes

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## Graphic

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Photo;

PHOTO: SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY NEWS

Yana Slobodova, shown with son Nikita, taught piano lessons at the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View.

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