Children's Writer Eduard Uspensky Dies at Age 80

The creator of Cheburashka and Crocodile Gena died after a long illness

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Eduard Uspensky, one of the country's most beloved children's writers, passed away Tuesday evening after a long illness. He was 80 years old.

Born in 1937, the height of Stalin's purges, one of the most horrible years in Russia's recent history, Uspensky grew up to be one of the funniest Soviet writers and the most recognizable names in children's literature.

Uspensky took up writing after graduating from Moscow Aviation Institute, where he studied engineering. His single most famous character is Cheburashka, a furry animal with enormous

ears, of indeterminate gender and ancestry. Generations of kids learned about what it is to be friends from watching animated series about the adventures of Cheburashka and his friend, Crocodile Gena, based on Uspensky's books. Cheburashka also became immensely popular in Japan.

Another creation that brought Uspensky fame is the village Prostokvashino and its inhabitants: Uncle Fyodor, a precocious six year old boy, who's always extremely serious (hence the nickname "uncle"); his talking dog Sharik and cat Matroskin.

Uspensky wrote most of the screenplays for the cartoons based on his books and fought for his rights to them. He had well-publicized spat with Soyuzmultfilm, the cartoon behemoth left over from the Soviet era. The conflict concerned the rights to the Prostokvashino franchise when Soyuzmultfilm produced new episodes without paying or consulting Uspensky.

In addition to his books and screenplays, Uspensky was a television and radio producer. He was behind the iconic children's TV show "Spokoinoi nochi, malyshi!"("Good Night, Kids") and "Radionyanya" ("Radio Nanny"), which explained grammar and basic science to small children. Uspensky also wrote "Grammar," a textbook for young kids that taught grammar rules under the guise of a fairy tale.

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