Simon Gonopolskiy

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Odessa
Ukraine
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Simon Gonopolskiy is a tall and broad-shouldered man with gray hair. He moves slowly and has a moderate rhythm and mode of speaking. Simon lives in a three-bedroom apartment with his son and his son's family; he has a separate room. The furniture in the apartment is from the 1980s; it is not too rich, rather moderate, typical of the intellectuals of that time and the apartment is ideally clean. There are a few bookcases, a sofa, a table and a few chairs in the living room, one carpet on the wall and another one on the floor. There is also a TV set. Sitting in this living room, Simon willingly tells me about his life and his relatives.

My family background

My father's father Israel Gonopolskiy was born in the late 1860s in the village of Petroverovka, Kherson province. I remember him well. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man. All men of our kinship were tall and had wide shoulders; people even said: the breed of Gonopolskiy. Grandfather Israel was a reserved and self-confident man. He wore traditional dark clothes: a black cap, a long jacket and boots. He had a big dark beard. My father told me that my grandfather was a farmer in Petroverovka. I don't think he owned a plot of land - I guess, he leased one. The family wasn't rich. There population in Petroverovka before World War I was Ukrainian and Jewish. There were no conflicts. My parents told me that during the Civil War 1, when various gangs 2 made pogroms 3, other villagers gave shelter in their cellars to the members of our family.

The name of my grandmother on my father's side was Mariam Gonopolskaya. I don't know her maiden name. She was born in Petroverovka in 1876. My grandmother was of average height, but she seemed tiny beside my grandfather. She always wore a long dark skirt and a kerchief - I don't ever remember her without a kerchief. She was a housewife and kept a kosher household. She was always responsive to the needs of others and raised her children to be sympathetic. My grandmother and grandfather had six children. They were all born in Petroverovka and finished the Russian elementary school in their village.

By the late 1920s, when agricultural cooperatives [see collective farm] 4 were organized in villages, my grandfather and his wife moved to their children in Odessa. They settled down in

Moldavanka 5. I don't know what my grandfather did in Odessa. My grandparents had a room on the first floor with an entrance from the street - they lived separately from their children. There was no kitchen - just a kerosene stove in the corner by the front door. They only had the most necessary furniture: beds, a table and chairs.

Grandfather Israel was a religious man: he went to synagogue and prayed at home. He always celebrated Sabbath. I remember it well since we traditionally visited him at Sabbath. I remember very well how my grandfather put on his tallit and prayed shaking his head and bowing from time to time. There were candles burning. Grandmother Mariam made finely cut onions sprinkled with sunflower oil; with brown bread it was considered to be a specialty. When we visited them my grandmother used to give me 10 kopecks and I bought mint tablets in a pharmacy that I ate like candy. My grandfather and grandmother communicated in Yiddish, but spoke Ukrainian to me since I didn't know Yiddish. I remember that my father treated grandfather Israel with great respect. My grandfather died in 1934, when my parents and I were absent, in Odessa. He must have died of some disease since he wasn't old at all. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

During the Great Patriotic War 6 my grandmother was in evacuation in Penza and then Kustanai with her younger daughter Dora's family. They returned to Odessa from evacuation in 1944. They settled down in the same house where they got a room and a kitchen on the second floor. My grandmother was much cared for and it was mandatory for members of the family to visit her. Grandmother Mariam died in 1959. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa but no Jewish traditions were observed.

My father's older sister Hanna was born in 1899. She got married in Petroverovka. Her husband's name was Joseph Spirt; he was a Jew. He was also from Petroverovka. I don't know what he did for a living. They moved to Odessa and lived in a big 25 square meter room in a communal apartment 7 in Tiraspolskaya Street in the center of town. Hanna worked at the shoe factory as a worker. Her son Ilia was born in 1926. During the war Hanna and her son were in evacuation in Kustanai with us. In 1943 Ilia was recruited to the army, finished an aviation school of gunners/radio operators and was at the front. Aunt Hanna's husband perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. Hanna returned to Odessa from evacuation in 1944 and worked at the same factory. Aunt Hanna was a really wise woman and relatives used to ask her for advice. She was beautiful and had a fine figure. My mother and she were good friends. We visited her often. At the end of her life Aunt Hanna lived with her sister Dora. Hanna died in 1989.

Ilia worked at a butchery in Odessa after the war. He got married to a Jewish girl. Their only daughter Rita was born in the 1950s. They divorced in the 1960s. Rita graduated from the Conservatory and played in the Odessa Opera orchestra. She emigrated to the US in the 1990s. I have no contact with her. Ilia died in 2000.

My father's sister Riva was born in 1903. She went to study in Kiev to become an astronomer. The family of my father believed she committed suicide because of unshared love. This happened in 1922.

My father's brother Izia was born in 1906. He moved to Odessa in the 1920s. I don't remember what he did for his living. Izia married a Jewish girl, Rosa, but they didn't have children. In the middle of the 1930s he was recruited to the army. He became a professional military serving in air force troops. Izia perished at the front in 1943.

My father's sister Dora was born in 1910. She moved to Odessa after my father. My father managed to help her get employment at the buttery. She was a laborer. Aunt Dora was as hardworking as my father. She was soon promoted to a more qualified position. Dora got married to a Jew, Efim Mezhysko. Her husband was an officer in the Red Army. In 1938 their son Senia was born. At the beginning of the war Dora's husband was wounded. He was taken to a hospital in Odessa. Then Dora, her son and Grandmother Mariam left Odessa escorting Dora's husband to the rear. They were in Penza where Dora's husband was in hospital. After he recovered he returned to the front and my aunt, her son and my grandmother joined us in Kustanai. They returned to Odessa after it was liberated. Dora's husband perished at the front. After the war Dora worked at the bakery factory and then in the trade business. Aunt Dora died in 1991.

Dora's son Senia Mezhysko worked as a docker in Odessa port. In the late 1990s he emigrated to the US with his wife Nonna, a Jewess, his son Mikhail and his son's family. Senia visited Odessa recently and his former colleagues welcomed him cordially.

My father's youngest brother Lyonia was born in 1913. He served in the army in the middle of the 1930s. After he demobilized he got married. In two years' time he was sent by the authorities to study in a military school that he finished shortly before the war. He went to the front in the rank of lieutenant when the war began and perished at the end of 1941. It happened so that his son Alik, born in evacuation at the end of 1941 never saw his father.

Alik finished a machine-tool college and worked as an engineer at a plant. He was also head of department. He married a Russian girl called Luba. In the 1960s their son Alexey was born. He graduated from Polytechnic Institute and married a Russian girl, Ira. In early 2000 Alik moved to Germany with his family. Alik and his wife Luba get social help there and Alexey and Ira work with a Russian newspaper.

My father Nusia Gonopolskiy was born in Petroverovka in 1901. He received elementary education. My father was a tall man with broad shoulders, regular features and thick black hair. I'm afraid, I don't know anything about his life in the village.

My grandfather on my mother's side Simkha Weiser was born in Petroverovka in the 1860s. My grandmother and mother told me about him. My mother's family was wealthier than my father's. Grandfather Simkha was an intelligent man with education. He was a Talmud interpreter. I don't know whether there was a synagogue in Petroverovka. People came to my grandfather to ask advice or got together to pray. I guess Grandfather Simkha had some kind of business. My grandfather died in Petroverovka in the 1920s.

The name of my grandmother on my mother's side was Tsylia Weiser. I don't know her maiden name. She was born in Petroverovka in the late 1870s. She was a short and lively woman. She always wore a kerchief. They lived in a house with three rooms and a kitchen. I don't remember any details about the house or furniture. My grandparents kept a cow and poultry. There was a big orchard around the house. I remember visiting my grandparents with my mother. My grandmother baked bread in the oven and made buns from the remaining flour. I can still remember their taste.

My grandmother lived in Petroverovka until 1935. My mother and I spent the summer before I started school at my grandmother's home and when we were leaving we took her with us. I guess she followed the kashrut when living with us since I remember that she was selective with the food

she ate. On Friday Grandmother Tsylia lit candles and, as I understand now, she went to the synagogue. Grandmother spoke Yiddish and I picked up some of the language. I remember how Grandmother Tsylia and I were stoking the stove using sunflower seed husk that was brought in sacks from the plant where my father was working. There was a special container in the oven for this husk. My grandmother and I used to spend hours adding husk to this container and she kept telling me stories about the creation of the world, Adam and Eve from the Old Testament. I understood a lot from what she was telling me. She came into our family without much fuss and she left it in the same manner. I can't remember when exactly she passed away, but it must have happened in the late 1930s and I must have been in a pioneer camp then. I know that she was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. Grandmother Tsylia had three sons and two daughters. All children finished the Russian elementary school in the village.

My mother's oldest brother Tsalia Weiser was born around 1899. He lived in Odessa at the time I remember him. He must have been a musician since I remember there was a big horn under his bed when we visited him. Uncle Tsalia died of cancer shortly before the war. His daughter Polia was born in 1919. Before the Great Patriotic War she worked at the telephone exchange center. She liked music very much and always sang when our family got together. During the war she was evacuated to Tashkent. Afterwards she returned to Odessa and worked at the same place as before. She married Misha Krutyansky, a Jew. They had a daughter, Sveta, and a son, Roman. Polia died in 1986.

My mother's brother Yasha Weiser was born in 1901. I don't remember what he did for a living before the war. He was married to a Jewish girl, Zhenia. Their son Lyova, born in 1921, graduated from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at Odessa University. Uncle Yasha and Lyova were recruited to the army at the very beginning of the Great Patriotic War. They both survived. Zhenia perished in Odessa during the occupation. After the war Yasha married Rosa, the widow of his younger brother Moisey, and moved to the town of Rustavi in the Caucasus. Uncle Yasha died in the middle of the 1980s.

My mother's third brother Moisey Weiser was born in 1906. Uncle Moisey worked at the confectionary factory. He was married and had two daughters, Marina and Mara. Uncle Moisey died of cancer before the war. His daughters live in Israel. I don't remember when they went there, about ten years ago or so. What they do there I don't know.

My mother's younger sister Mara Weiser was born in 1908. She got married and lived in the same building as Uncle Moisey in Frantz Mering Street in Odessa. Mara's name in marriage was Seltzer. Her daughter Riva was a few years older than I. She was a slim pretty girl and was a success with boys. During the occupation Mara and her daughter stayed in Odessa. They perished in the ghetto. We were told after the war that Riva's classmate, a Russian boy, perished with them when trying to rescue them.

My mother Rosa Weiser was born in Peroverovka in 1903. She was beautiful and had black and very expressive eyes. My mother finished Russian elementary school. She spoke fluent Russian and read a lot. My grandmother taught her how to cook and keep the house.

My mother's and my father's parents were neighbors and my parents knew each other since they were children. They had a traditional Jewish wedding in the late 1920s. The newly-weds moved to Odessa. They managed to find accommodation in the vicinity of Privoz market. My father went to

work at the buttery. He was an operator of the pressing unit that pressed oil from sunflower seeds. My father was a hardworking employee and was respected by his management. He joined the Party. My mother was a housewife.

Growing up

I was born on 17th November 1927. I was named Simon after my grandfather Simkha. We lived in a small room of about 12 square meters. I remember myself standing in my cot and also my father's brother and acquaintances visiting us. I also remember my first toy: an aluminum gun with a cork that I could shoot. I remember overturning a bowl of hot borsch: I still have a scar on my neck. I didn't like borsch until I got really hungry during the war. My parents' brothers and sisters gradually moved to Odessa from Petroverovka. They stayed with us at the beginning and worked at the buttery where my father helped them to get jobs.

I remember when in 1933 my father came home and said that all communists were sent to villages to help collective farmers since they were having a hard time [The interviewee is referring to the time of the famine in Ukraine] 8. He was explaining to my mother that it was necessary to take every effort to get good crops. He left and in some time my mother and I joined him in the village of Grossulovo, Odessa region. It was fall and we went by train - I remember this was my first trip by train.

My mother had potatoes and some other food with her. When we came to the house where my father was staying and my mother asked the mistress of the house whether she could cook dinner, the mistress of the house closed the door immediately so that her neighbors didn't notice that there was food cooked. My mother peeled some potatoes and the mistress of the house didn't allow her to throw away those peels. She explained that they could be utilized, too. I remember people swollen from starvation and I also remember that people were buried without coffins. That winter was full of hardships. People ate acacia flowers in spring. I was too small to know what position my father was holding, but I remember that people treated him with respect. In summer my mother fell ill and was taken to Odessa. I stayed with my father. I remember how we went to the slaughterhouse where my father asked for a piece of meat to cook for me. In the fall of 1934 after harvesting was over we returned to the town. I remember that my father's bosses were reluctant to let him go. He went back to work at the plant, but he got into an accident and injured a joint of his finger. He began to do some administrative work.

I started school in 1936. I studied in a Ukrainian school. There were children of various nationalities at school. I remember that we didn't care about issues of nationality. My first teacher Fania Solomonovna was a very wise and reserved woman. I had no problems with my studies. My favorite subjects were geography and history. I was also good at mathematics and physics. I was fond of modeling and attended a modeling club at the Town House of Pioneers. It was housed in the former Count Vorontsov 9 Palace on Primorskiy Boulevard. It was a long way from home, but my mother didn't mind my going there alone. I liked making model planes and launch them.

My parents had the idea of teaching me music. They took me to an old Jewish musician for an audition. He listened to me and said that it might work to teach me music. However, I wasn't eager to learn to play and my parents were not too insistent and the idea faded away. I also attended a chess club at the housing department. I read a lot and was fond of science fiction and historical books. Later I became fond to meet with girls.

Boys got together to play football and the so-called 'mayalki' - pieces of fur with weight - hitting them up with a foot, at a spot behind Privoz market. There was an old Christian cemetery that was removed before the Great Patriotic War and the area was turned into a park. Winters were cold with lots of snow and we skated. We made skates from wooden bars that we tied to boots with a piece of cable. There was an asphalted street in our neighborhood - Ekaterininskaya Street. We used to jump on vehicles from behind to get a ride. There were few cars in the town. People rode coaches in summer and sleighs in winter.

I remember weddings in our neighborhood. Tables were set up in the yard. The bride's relatives used to sit on one side of the table and the bridegroom's relatives were sitting on the other side. They were joking and betting about who would eat more or who was bigger. There were many jokes, but there was no wickedness.

There were pickpockets in the Odessa of my childhood, but there were no bandits. They might have picked a purse, but I don't remember any accidents resulting in injury. There was lack of commodities in stores and there were always lines. There was hardly any construction in town and people didn't have sufficient accommodation opportunities.

So at the beginning of the 1940s we lived in the same neighborhood, but in another apartment. We had the biggest room in a three-bedroom communal apartment. The windows faced the south and in summer we had shutters on the windows for protection from extremely strong sunshine. The room was modestly furnished: there was a wardrobe, a bookcase with books in Russian, my parents' bed and my folding bed. There was a sofa where our frequent guests, friends of my parents, slept sometimes. A young girl, our relative from Petroverovka, stayed in our room when she studied at university. We got along well with the Volkovs, our Russian neighbors. We lived just near Privoz [market]. There were Russian and Jewish traders. They often spoke Yiddish, but always argued in Russian. Our neighbor Manya was an irrefutable authority in our house. She watched that everything was in order in our yard and would even reprimand young housewives that got too carried away with a chat and forgot about making lunch for their husbands, or a newly-wed spouse coming home late. Nobody felt hurt for being told off. In 1941 Manya watched that black out requirements were followed in our yard during air raids.

Since my father was a communist, he didn't go to the synagogue and we didn't observe any Jewish traditions, although we always visited Grandmother Mariam and Grandfather Israel on holidays. I didn't take any interest in the names of these holidays and nobody explained any details to me. I only remember the festive atmosphere in my grandparents' house. Occasionally my mother went to the synagogue with Grandmother Tsylia, who had moved in with us in the 1930s.

Of course, we celebrated Soviet holidays: I remember the mandatory parades on 1st May and October Revolution Day [10] to which my father took me. I remember the election campaign for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. There was a meeting with many people involved where Khenkin, a Jew, candidate for the deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and a well-known loader in the port, made a speech.

When I studied at school New Year's celebrations were allowed. There was a Christmas Tree decorated at school, but we never had a tree at home - I guess it must have been too expensive. I remember we had many books and read a lot - fiction, historical novels. There were newspapers because my father was interested in politics. I also subscribed to 'Pioneer Pravda' ['Pioneer Truth']:

I was responsible for the subscription of my classmates to this newspaper. Before the war my father made a crystal receiver and we listened to the news on the radio.

We weren't wealthy. I remember my father and I went to buy 200 grams of 'tea time' sausage and it was a luxury. My mother made jam for winter. My father and I had sweet teeth and enjoyed eating this jam secretly when mother was at work. We had only necessary clothes, but clothes weren't of any importance at that time. In summer my father, mother and I used to go to the seashore in Arkadia or Luzanovka [town beaches] for a whole day. We took our Primus stove and food with us. I had holidays in pioneer camps at the seashore several times. It was a tradition there to make a fire in the evening, swim in the sea at night when the seawater phosphoresces and so does human skin. My first outings with girls were in the camp. We went hiking and worked in collective farm fields. I took part in all activities.

The events of 1937 [during the so-called Great Terror] 11 didn't impact our family directly. But I remember how my father came home and complained to my mother that he was forced to write a report on someone, but he had no intention to act against his conscience. Shortly afterwards my father changed his job: he went to work at a felt factory where he became a foreman. The war was expected at the very beginning of the 1940s. There was a training course arranged to teach people how to act during an air raid. We, teenagers, attended it. In summer 1940 after classes were over our school was modified to become a military hospital and schoolchildren were transferred to another school in Moldavanka.

During the war

On 23rd June 1941 - the second day of the war - we saw German planes for the first time. All defense facilities were involved: antiaircraft guns and floodlights, and we could see German planes in the crossing light of these floodlights. Germans began to bomb Odessa about a month after the war began. They dropped firebombs in quadrants with typical German pedantry. These bombs weighed about one kilogram, but there were so many of them. We, boys, watched the roofs and dropped firebombs onto stones. Those bombs caused many fires when falling on roofs.

When Privoz market was set on fire we moved into Uncle Moisey's apartment in the center of the town. His family moved to some relatives in the neighborhood of Fontanka. This neighborhood wasn't bombed so often. The town was running out of food stocks. A few times I and some other boys went to the fields out of town by tram to dig out some potatoes and other vegetables. The hardest time was when Germans occupied Beliaevka where there was a water supply facility. They shut down the water supply to the town. The population received coupons for half a bucket of water per person. However, there was still no water to release despite those coupons. There was some water in wells and there were kilometer long lines near such wells. The fascists were close to Odessa. They were shelling the town. When shells were falling around people in lines, they scattered around leaving their buckets with water on the pavement.

When the threat of occupation became very definite people began to erect barricades. We, boys, also took part in it. Authorities began to give people clothes from storage facilities. My mother and I received a military uniform overcoat and boots. I remember a Cossack equestrian unit arriving at Sobornaya Square: an old man and a bunch of his relatives with weapons. They had very patriotic spirits, but there wasn't much they could contribute to the struggle: many of them perished fighting on their horses against tanks. People had high patriotic spirits: 17-year-old boys

volunteered to the front. There weren't enough weapons and most often their first combat action ended in hospital at best. There was a military hospital in the town. We, boys, ran there to look at wounded patients.

My father was in a fighting battalion 12 that fought against German forces that landed in the rear. When the siege of Odessa began my father told my mother, 'Rosa, the situation is serious. I will join the army and you need to leave town'. All I know is that my father was in the Primorskaya army defending Odessa. Sometimes he came home by tram from the frontline. Trams commuted from Kulikovo Polie [a square near the railway station] to the frontline where my father's military unit was deployed. I remember him taking me to have a meal in their military canteen twice: we didn't have enough food at home. On 28th September we got tickets enabling us to board a ship. It was difficult to get to the port. My father took us there along with his sister Hanna and her son Ilia on a military truck. This took place at the beginning of October, two weeks before Soviet troops left Odessa. We never saw my father again. Later our neighbors said that he came to bring them bread several times.

Our ship left Odessa in the evening. We were bombed several times, but we survived. In two days we reached Novorossiysk [700 km to Odessa by sea] where we were accommodated in some storage facility. Later we left in eastern direction by train. An evacuation service was organized to help people evacuate at this hard time. Our trip lasted a month. We were on a freight train with benches in railcars. There were heating stoves in the railcars. When the train stopped we got boiling water, meals and even fuel for stoves. The train was bombed several times. Locomotive operators had to either speed up or pull up to avoid bombs. Every now and then the train stopped and we scattered around to hide from air raids.

I shall never forget when a plane on a low-level flight was firing at defenseless people and we could see the pilot wearing goggles. At one of the stations we saw a train with German families from Povolzhiye that were taken farther inland. The fascists bombed this train and many people perished. Such a paradox of the war! On the way we heard that the Soviet army left Odessa, although we believed it would never happen this way. We didn't have any information about my father. We didn't even have the number of the field post to write to him. My mother was very concerned, but she didn't show it.

In the fall of 1941 we arrived in the town of Kustanai in Kazakhstan [2,450 km from Odessa]. This was a distant location and the train had to get there via a railroad spur. The town was located in the steppe. There were one- storied houses. All inhabitants kept cows that provided milk for food and dung. There were two schools in town. Evacuated people were accommodated in the cultural center. My mother, aunt and I were sitting on our luggage not knowing what was going to happen.

All of a sudden a big, broad-shouldered and strong-willed woman entered the building. She went by all other people and stopped in front of us. She said, 'Get your luggage and follow me'. My mother looked at Aunt Hanna, who said, 'Lets not waste our time and go'. We picked our luggage and followed the woman: my mother, my aunt, Ilia and I. This woman had a house made from saman: bricks made from straw and clay. The house looked very poor inside. Anastasia Mikhailovna, our landlady - or Stura, as we called her - washed us since we had traveled for about a month and were dirty. She gave us food and we stayed in her house. She told us that we were supposed to be taken even farther to the steppe, to some Kazakh settlements where we would be lost for sure, not

knowing the language. Stura didn't work. She had a kitchen garden and a cow. Her husband was a military guard, but then he went to the front. They had three children. We stayed in her house for some time. My mother received some allowances per my father's officer certificate. My mother and I wore those same overcoats and leather boots that we received at the storage facility in the last days of the siege of Odessa.

In about half a year Stura found a bigger apartment in a wooden house for us. Tenants and livestock stayed in the house in winter. Once a girl brought to our house an invoice for an allowance as for a family of an officer. She was holding the paper behind her back and while she was talking to us a goat chewed on the paper. The girl got frightened and burst into tears. My mother wrote a confirmation note that the goat had eaten the paper. Fortunately, the girl had no problems with her bosses.

I went to the 7th grade at school in Kustanai. It was housed in a two- storied building. There were representatives of various nationalities in my class: Russian, Kazakh and Ukrainian children. Many came from evacuated families. At the very beginning of my studies local boys decided to test my character. I had never been a brawler before, but when they called me a 'zhyd' [kike] I felt hurt. We didn't have bags and tied books together with a wire. I used this wire to fight with them and this solved the problem. They never teased me again. I finished the 7th grade at the age of 15. I was tall and broad-shouldered and went to work as an assistant worker at the woodworking facility.

After work my cousin Ilia and I took small bags with sawdust, chips and sticks home. This was fuel for the stove. Our landlords' daughter worked at the milling facility and brought bran from work. We made food from this bran. We shared everything we had and got along well with our landlords. I matured at work. I'm grateful to my mother for sending me to work. Later the factory began to manufacture spoons, saltcellars and boxes from production wastes and I learned the profession of a turner. I didn't go back to school. By that time an aviation school was relocated to Kustanai. They required technicians to repair planes. They employed the most skilled senior schoolchildren, and I was one of them. We received overalls for work and I became a motorist apprentice. Before going home from work I applied machine oil onto my face and hands to look like a mature worker. I was just a boy then.

When Odessa was liberated in April 1944 my mother wrote to the Volkovs, our neighbor tenants. They replied that we could return to our apartment. I was 17 and I was to be drafted to the army in one year's time. My mother said that when I was to be recruited she would go home to Odessa. I went to the military registry office to volunteer to the army. My mother left for Odessa. She returned to our apartment in Privoznaya Street. The Volkovs lived in the smaller room and my mother lived in the bigger passage room.

Post-war

My father didn't return from the front and we didn't receive any notification about him. My mother told me after the war, when I was in the army, that my father's fellow comrade found her. He told her that he was in the same military unit as my father. They were near Sevastopol and after Sevastopol was left to the Germans they relocated to Novorossiysk. They became friends and promised one another that in case one of them perished the other one would find his family. This man found my mother. He was a shoemaker and made my mother a pair of shoes in memory of my father. My mother said that he brought her shoes and she never saw him again. I failed to find him

later. Shortly afterwards my mother received the notification that my father was missing. After the war she received a pension for my father. In the 1970s I went to the chief military archive in Podolsk where I got confirmation that my father had perished near Novorossiysk.

In the army I continued serving as an aviation mechanic in the same unit where I had worked as a civilian. I was young and suffered from hunger terribly. I remember how we marched to work at the butchery where we received a bowl of hot soup that appeased our hunger for a short while. In 1945 our military unit relocated to Novosibirsk. It was there that I got to know that the state of Israel was established in 1948. We had little information. But I was glad that at least any talks around me about Jews being poor fighters ceased.

During that time I joined the Communist Party - my faith in Stalin was still firm then. An order was issued stating that all officers that didn't have a higher education could receive it in the military unit. Evening schools for officers were opened. I obtained a permit to attend an evening school even though I was a master sergeant. I went to the 9th grade skipping the 8th grade. Pilots' wives were teachers in our school. Since I lived in a barrack I arranged a little spot for doing homework. I finished evening school in 1951. I demobilized in the rank of master sergeant in 1952.

I arrived in Odessa in 1952. My mother had a hard life. My father's pension was very small and she had to work to make a living. We were very poor. I wore my military coat for two years before I could buy a regular coat. I went to work at Kirov 13 machine tool plant. I learned several professions and was enrolled in one of the first crews of chisel workers that were known for their high qualifications. I got a raise of salary. In 1953 I entered the evening department at Leningrad Industrial Institute. I worked in shifts: one week I worked at daytime and then two weeks at night shift to be able to attend classes.

In 1952 the Doctors' Plot 14 agitated all Soviet people. I was an agitator during the election to the Supreme Soviet and many asked me whether this was true. I couldn't give an unambiguous answer. I couldn't believe this could be true and on the other hand I couldn't help believing. This was a shock. I didn't identify myself as a Jew when I was in the army, but at that period I began to feel it frequently and it hurt. I lacked information to come to the correct conclusion. We received uncorroborated information. When Stalin died we grieved and were concerned about the future. The victory in the Great Patriotic War was closely tied to the name of Stalin. When I was just a child I realized how well organized the process of evacuation had been. There was clear organization and it was at the time when Stalin ruled the country. I had respect for Stalin, although after the war I began to have questions and doubts.

My wife

I met my future wife Ella Gellerman at the institute in 1953. She was born in Kharkov in 1933. Her family lived in Kharkov before the war. Her father Jacob Gellerman was recruited to the army in the first days of the war. He perished near Leningrad in 1943. Her mother Bella Gellerman and Ella were in evacuation in Sterlitamak, Bashkiria [Russia, 2,000 km from Odessa]. Ella's sister Ania, born in Sterlitamak at the end of 1941, never saw her father. Ania graduated from a technical college in Odessa and worked at the same plant as me. In 1960 she married Valentin Bekker, a Jew, her school mate. They have a daughter called Nina. Ella's mother worked at the machine tool plant. She was a tool specialist at the central storage facility. The plant relocated to Odessa in 1944. Ella's family moved to Odessa with the plant.

They received a small room in a communal apartment. Her mother earned so little that she could hardly provide for the family. Ella went to study at the flour milling college after finishing lower secondary school. After finishing college she completed her two-year [mandatory] job assignment 15 in Odessa region. After that she got employment at the bakery in Odessa where she was a production engineer. Later she entered the machine building faculty of Odessa Polytechnic College. We rarely saw each other since we worked different shifts. We got married in 1956. We rented a corner in a room before we could afford to rent a whole room.

In 1957 the plant constructed its first apartment building for employees where we received a room in a communal apartment. We lived there for 15 years until 1972. We didn't have enough space, but at least, it was our own dwelling. It was hard to work and study, especially for my wife and we got depressed every now and then, but anyway, we graduated from the institute in 1959. This institute got the status of Odessa Polytechnic College in 1956.

Our son was born on 1st April 1960. We named him Natan after my father Nusia. It's quite common among Jews to give a name in honor of a relative that begins with the same initial letter. [Editor's note: For Jews it is common to give a child the full name of a dead relative, usually a grandparent or great-grandparent. In the former USSR, Jews instead of taking the full name of the relative, often just took the initial name.] Ella continued working and my mother helped us to look after our son. She came in the morning and stayed with her grandson the whole day. Once she fell ill, but didn't complain until the ache in her side became unbearable. When she was taken to hospital it was too late: she had peritonitis and this couldn't be helped. My mother died in 1962. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery.

Upon graduation I was promoted to the engineer's position at the design office. Later I became head of the design department that designed accessories for machine units. I was awarded two medals at VDNH [All-Union Exhibitions of Achievements of Public Economy] for my accomplishments. I'm very proud of these awards. Later I became deputy chief engineer for export operations and sometimes I traveled abroad.

We lived in Belinskiy Street close to the sea. After work I took my son to the seashore. He learned to swim and dive when he was a small boy. In summer we tried to get out of town. We sometimes rented a room at the seashore in Kryzhanovka near Odessa. I often bought cruises on the Black Sea at the plant. We went to the Crimea and Caucasus; we earned well at that time and could afford it. My family loved the beautiful nature of those regions very much. We read a lot of fiction and Soviet magazines. We had many interesting friends, mainly Jews.

We also traveled to Novorossiysk, where my father perished, but all we found there was a common grave. In 1972 we moved to another neighborhood where the plant constructed another apartment building with the so-called participation of employees. This meant that I worked at the construction site with other workers after work for a few years. We received a two- bedroom apartment and my son got a room of his own. In this same apartment building my wife's mother received a one-bedroom apartment. In some time we exchanged our apartments for a bigger one. We lived with my mother-in-law until she moved to Germany in 1990 with her younger daughter Ania, Ania's husband Valentin and their daughter Nina.

My son Natan finished school in 1977 and entered the Mechanic Faculty of Polytechnic College. Upon graduation he worked at the Research Institute of Machine and Automatic Units. He entered

the post-graduate school in the Machine Building Institute in Moscow. When Perestroika 16 began this institute was closed and he worked as the director of laboratory and then as production engineer at the machine tool plant. After the plant was shut down Natan learned computer programming. He works for a private company now. He is fond of sailing. He traveled to Turkey, Bulgaria, etc. in his yacht. He traveled across the Black Sea. He is vice-president of the Odessa Sailing Federation. He met his wife Evgenia Trofimova at the sailing club. She is Russian, but my wife and I had no objections to their marriage.

Their son Roman, my grandson, was born in 1987. We live together. At the beginning Roman studied at a Russian secondary school with advanced teaching of the English language. Later his parents sent him to the Jewish school Tali. We wanted our grandson to study Jewish traditions and rituals. Besides, this school is very well equipped. My grandson was going to follow into his father's and grandfather's footsteps and after finishing the 9th grade at school he went to Primorskiy Lyceum. Roman is also fond of sailing like his parents. He went on advanced sailing trips and got into storms.

My wife worked at SKB-3, a special design office. She climbed up the ladder until she reached the position of 1st grade designer. She was a very sensitive woman. She wrote poems. Ella died in a bus accident in 2000 on her way back home from Germany where she was visiting her mother and younger sister. The bus overturned near Lvov. She didn't have outer injuries, therefore doctors paid less attention to her. She died of inner hemorrhages. I cannot forget her: she was a brilliant wife and mother. We buried her in accordance with the Jewish tradition in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. Since then my son and I have visited the synagogue when they say memorial prayers. They regularly send us a card from the synagogue on the day of my wife's anniversary since the Jewish and Gregorian calendars are different.

Speaking about my Jewish origin and identity it has never occurred to me to forget my identity, but we knew so little. My wife took great efforts to get books about Jewish religion, traditions and history in the 1970s and 1980s. I told my son all I knew. When my son grew older he began to read books about Judaism. He has a very serious attitude towards these issues and often speaks with his son Roman about the Jewish heritage. I attend the synagogue at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I take part in activities arranged by Gemilut Hesed. I borrow books from the Jewish library. I'm especially interested in magazines and newspapers from Israel. I hope Israel will have a peaceful future.

Glossary

1 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti- communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti- Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of

immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

2 Gangs

During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

3 Pogroms in Ukraine

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

4 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

5 Moldavanka

Poor Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa.

6 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

7 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

8 Famine in Ukraine

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

9 Vorontsov, Mikhail Semyonovich (1782-1856)

Russian statesman and count, governor-general of Novorussia and Odessa from 1823-1844. His contribution to the development of Odessa is truly immense. Vorontsov was an energetic and dynamic administrator, happy only when he had some challenge to meet, and Novorussia provided enough of those. His wife, Elizaveta Vorontsova, is known for having had an affair with the famous poet Alexandr Pushkin, when the latter was exiled to Odessa due to his suspected anti-state activities. Pushkin dedicated a number of poems to Countess Vorontsova. In 1844 Vorontsov, by then 62 years old, was appointed governor-general of the Caucasus and commander-in-chief of the Russian forces there, in addition to his duties in Novorussia. He spent the next 10 years either in military action in the Caucasus or in developing economic projects in both regions.

10 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

11 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

12 Fighting battalion

People's volunteer corps during World War II; its soldiers patrolled towns, dug trenches and kept an eye on buildings during night bombing raids. Students often volunteered for these fighting battalions.

13 Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934)

Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

14 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

15 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

16 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.