

Grigoriy Fihtman

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Natalia Fomina

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Grigoriy Samuelovich Fihtman and his wife Raisa Moiseyevna, a small amiable lady, live in the very heart of Moldavanka on the second floor of a two-storied wing house in an old Odessa yard. The front door opens into a small hallway that also serves as a kitchen: there is a tap and a sink and a stove in here. A small room with two windows is furnished with comfortable pieces of furniture: a big sofa by the wall against the windows, where the host and hostess probably sleep, a wardrobe, a cupboard, a table and a couch by a window. There are carpets on the walls. There is a pile of newspapers: Grigoriy Samuelovich is interested in politics. He is a short, thin and lively man. He has a strong teacher's voice and correct literary language sounding similar to newspaper editorial articles. He enjoys telling his story and tells it with all details.

My family background

I am going to be brief telling about my grandmothers and grandfathers. My paternal grandfather Avrum Fihtman was born and lived in the 19th century in Yampol town in Podolia [Yampol was a district town of Podolsk province (present Vinnitsa region). According to census in 1897 there were 6 600 residents including 2 800 Jews.] Я I know that grandfather Avrum died when my father was a young man in the 1890s. I don't remember my grandmother's name. They were not a wealthy family. My father had several brothers. One of them moved to England before the October revolution [1](#). My parents corresponded with him until before the Great Patriotic War [2](#). I don't know his name, though. I remember a little one of my father's older brothers. His name was Moisha. My father and mother and I went to see him in Yampol where he resided. He was very ill and now I understand that this was his last meeting with my father. Uncle Moisha died shortly afterward. Uncle Moisha had a family and children, but they were much older than I and I don't remember them.

I remember my father's another brother Borukh living in Mogilyov-Podolskiy, much better since I saw him few times. Borukh had two children: a son and a daughter. Son Abram named after grandfather was my senior. He was born in 1918. He was hard to get on with. My father said that when he visited his brother little Abram always tried to hide away from his relatives. The daughter's name was Polina, and her Jewish name was Perl. During the Great patriotic war Polina and her parents, uncle Borukh and aunt, whose name I don't remember, were in a ghetto. I think my aunt died in the ghetto and uncle Borukh died right after liberation. Polina survived. Abram was at the front at that time. He was recruited to the army on the first day of the war. He was 23 in 1941. He was severely wounded, but he survived. He met Maria, a Russian girl, in the hospital in Moscow region. They got married and when Mogilyov-Podolskiy was liberated Abram and his wife arrived there. He was demobilized from the army being an invalid of the war. His parents were gone. Abram was business-oriented and was doing well. He worked in the Communekhos agency

and arranged for an apartment for himself. Then he worked as director of the market in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They had a good life. His wife Maria finished extramural department of the Vinnitsa Pedagogical College and taught Russian literature and language at school. They didn't have children. I didn't get along with Abram. Few years ago (2001) he died in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Uncle Borukh's daughter Polina worked as an accountant. She got married and had a son. I saw him when he went to a kindergarten. Polina divorced her husband. I don't even remember his name.

My father Samuel Fihman, one of the younger children, was born in Yampol in 1883. I cannot say where he studied besides cheder. He could speak fluent Russian and read in it well. In 1896, at the age of 13 my father went to work in Odessa. There were some distant relatives living in Odessa. I don't know anything about them. They helped my father to find a job. My father worked as designer for an owner of a fashionable women's clothes store in Deribassovskaya Street. According to what my father said this was a big and rich store: there was a big choice of French perfumery and haberdashery from all over Europe. My father designed shop windows. He liked his job and his master valued him high. He even sent him to polish his skills in Kiev.

My maternal grandfather was my father's oldest brother. My father married his niece who was his age. Such marriages were frequent at the time. My grandfather Zelman Fihman lived in Dzygovka village [Dzygovka was a town in Yampol district Podolsk province (Vinnitsa region at present). Its population in 1897 was 7 194 people, 2 187 of them were Jews], near Yampol. Grandfather Zelman was about 20 years older than my father. This means that he was born in the 1860s. I knew his wife, my grandmother Haya Fihman, a little. She lived with us in Zhmerinka. I remember her lighting candles on Friday. She always wore a kerchief at this time. She was a quiet and nice grandmother. I loved her. Grandmother loved it when I sang her children's songs. Grandmother Haya spoke Yiddish at home, but she could write and read in Yiddish well. When my mother was busy, my grandmother used to read me books in Russian. Grandmother Haya died when I was 9. This happened in 1935. I was in a pioneer camp and she was buried in my absence.

I don't know how many children grandmother Haya had, but I remember one of my mother's brothers. Uncle Leibush lived in Odessa in Bolgarskaya Street. I visited him several times before the Great Patriotic War. I don't remember his wife. He welcomed me warmly. His wife was a housewife. Uncle Leibush was a worker in a plant. . He took me for a walk in Odessa and showed me Arcadia [well-known Odessa beach, a recreation place], and the Opera Theater on the outside, however. They had two children: son Munia, 2 years older than I, born in 1925, and daughter Zhenia, a couple of years younger than I. Uncle Leibush's family perished during the Great Patriotic War in Odessa [3](#). After demobilization in 1946 I came to Odessa looking for them. Whatever little I managed to find out indicated that uncle Leibush and Munia perished during defense of the town. Their neighbors said that Romanians took away Zhenia and her mother, uncle Leibush's wife, in 1941 and nobody ever saw them again. Where were they taken or where did they perish? This is not known, but they did perish, that's for sure.

My mother Sima Fihman was born in Dzygovka in 1886. She finished a primary school in Dzygovka and then studied in a grammar school in Yampol for two years. Her parents wanted to give her good education. I don't think they were wealthy. We didn't have any valuables proving my grandparents' wealth somehow. My mother was short, thin, nice and quiet. When I went to the primary school she helped me do my homework. She also liked embroidery and I can still see her works before my eyes like in a dream.

My parents got married in 1908. My father took my mother to Odessa where they had a wedding party. I have no doubts that they had a chuppah: it couldn't have been otherwise in those years. My father continued his work in the store. They rented an apartment in Malaya Arnautskaya Street. I know from my father that their first son died before he turned one year and a half. Their next two sons also died. I know that the name of one of these three boys was Zelman. Perhaps, he was named after my mother's father who had died before. When we lived in Zhmerinka I remember a photograph of a small boy. I asked my mother: 'Who is this?' and she answered: This is your brother Zelman, he was one year and a half when he died'. In 1916 my mother had her fourth son. They named him Abram. In 1921, during the period of horrible famine [4](#), my parents moved to Zhmerinka. Some of their relatives living there wrote them that it was easier there to get food. The famine was horrible in 1921. My parents never went back to Odessa, though my father was willing to return. He traveled to Odessa several times and even found a job there, but he couldn't get an apartment. They stayed in Zhmerinka for twenty years.

Growing up

I was born in 1926. We rented an apartment in Zhmerinka. We lived in one apartment the first seven years of my life. Our landlords, Ukrainian or Russian, were like family to us. When I turned 8 we moved to another apartment that we rented from Studzinskiye, a Polish family. We went along well with them. Ivan Studzinskiy was a joiner in a railroad depot. His wife Katia was a housewife. She was very nice, cheerful and kind. They had three sons and they were married. Their oldest son Volodia was a locomotive operator. The middle son's name was Konstantin and the youngest was Fyodor. Volodia had two children and I used to play with them. The Studzinskiys owned a house and we rented its basement part. We had two small rooms, a kitchen and a corridor. We felt quite comfortable there. My parents had few pieces of furniture from Odessa. My father knew about beautiful furniture. We had a beautiful round table on one massive leg forking into four feet decorated with carving at the bottom. There were beautiful chairs well matched with the table. There was an ordinary sofa. There was a kerosene lamp with nice dim glass lampshade lighting the room. It was hanging on the ceiling and my father lit it every evening. When I was small I shared a room with grandmother Haya. Then she died and it became my room. I remember well that my parents were eager to have an apartment of their own and saved every nickel to buy a dwelling. Not many of our Russian or Jewish acquaintances in Zhmerinka had their own dwelling.

My father never joined the Party. He was an ordinary worker. He had different jobs trying to provide for his family. He worked at the railroad and a sawmill. Like many others he was interested in politics. He liked to read 'Izvestiya' [Izvestiya - News, daily communist newspaper published in Moscow], and he also subscribed to the 'Der emes' (Truth) in Yiddish. There was a time when this newspaper was issued and its articles were translated from the Pravda newspaper ['Truth', the main paper of the Communist Party of the USSR]. My mother was a housewife. She was a very good housewife: the house glittered with cleanness. My mother mainly cooked kosher food. Dairy and meat products were never mixed. We didn't have pork. Chickens were taken to a shochet. It was my duty to go to shochet. There was a big market in Zhmerinka where mother bought sour cream, milk and cottage cheese. We bought sugar and pasta in stores, but we didn't buy many products there. My mother made noodles at home. She also baked delicious pastries, although she didn't do it often. She made pies with cherries and poppy seed rolls. We only spoke Yiddish at home, but we also knew Russian well.

My mother and father weren't fanatically religious, but they always celebrated Jewish holidays. They went to the synagogue on holidays. My mother only used special crockery at Pesach. We didn't have anything non-kosher at home through 8 days of Pesach. We dressed up on holidays. My mother made matzah pudding, very delicious. The table was set according to the rules: something bitter, matzah and everybody had their own wine glasses. I don't remember any details, though. I can still see my little blue cup with 'Pesach' engraved on it. I remember well that there was the first night and the second night. My father recited the prayer and told me a little about the history of this holiday. He said it was necessary to drink four glasses of wine, but we only sipped wine from our glasses. There were no guests; everybody celebrated with their own families. I also remember that my mother treated the Studzinskiy family to her Pesach dishes. Katia also brought us Easter bread and painted eggs on Catholic Easter. We also celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My mother and father fasted. I began to fast when I studied in the 6th or 7th grade. We also lit candles at Chanukkah: another candle each day, 8 candles in total. I liked playing with a whipping top. I also received Chanukkah gelt of few kopecks. I don't remember much of Purim, but I remember that my mother baked hamantashen and told me why they had to be this shape.

I don't know how many synagogues there were in Zhmerinka. I remember one located nearby. My parents went to the synagogue and when I grew older they took me several times for a minyan. I felt honored to be invited to the synagogue. However, I had to go in and out of there unnoticed since I was an active pioneer. I found everything interesting: a nicely decorated rostrum, an ark containing the Torah with a beautiful velvet curtain. Everything looked festive. There was a balcony for women on the second floor. Men sat in the pews, speaking theatrical language. Women were in kerchiefs and men wore their yarmulkes or hats. I've never tried on a yarmulka. I had a tubeteika cap. Actually, most people wore headpieces at the time. Boys like colorful embroidered tubeteika caps. It was allowed to wear it to the synagogue.

There was famine in Ukraine in 1933. I remember my mother and father getting corn flour, though I don't know how and where they got it. They made flat breads called 'malaih' that were cut to pieces and my mother gave us some of it, but they were mainly made for sale. My mother and grandmother Haya went to sell this bread at the market. They bought flour for the money they got and then sold bread again. There was a Torgsin store [5](#) in Zhmerinka. I even remember the street, but we didn't have anything to take there. Thus, we received some money from my father's brother in London few times and bought food products in Torgsin. We bought sugar, rice and flour. My father was afraid of authorities, though. They didn't appreciate any ties with foreigners, particularly, with the Joint that was considered to be a counterrevolutionary organization.

I went to a Ukrainian school at the age of 8 in 1934. Children went to school at the age of 8 then. Since my father was a railroad worker I went to the railroad school that was prestigious in the town. It was located near the railway station. There were best teachers and classrooms were better equipped in this school. There was electricity at school and I liked coming there. There was light at school! I liked literature, history and geography. I had all excellent marks in these subjects. I didn't do so well at physics or mathematic. There were many Jewish children at school and there were also Russian and Ukrainian children. I got along well with all schoolmates, but there was one anti-Semitic boy named Grigoriy Zabolotny. Since I was short I sat at the first or second desk. Grigoriy sat behind me and constantly picked on me. I said to him: 'But your name and mine is Grigoriy' and he replied: 'Yes, but you are a different Grigoriy'. He made it clear to me that my name wasn't

Grigoriy, and in truth I was Gershl, Jew. Zabolotny and his buddies were meeting schoolchildren by the front door before school. They lined up by the walls in the corridor and pushed everybody from one wall to another. If you dropped your bag, for example, and bent to pick it, they hit you on your back. So I tried to come to school shortly before classes and when the bell rang they had to go to the classroom and I followed them. Zabolotny pulled girls, particularly Jewish girls, by their plates and wrote things with chalk on their back. However, I never heard him saying 'zhyd' [abusive word for a Jew]. When I returned to Zhmerinka in 1946, I heard that this Grigoriy became a policeman on the first days of the war.

Zhmerinka of my childhood was a small town. There were one-storied building with few two-storied houses in the center. There was a nice park founded by a landlord named Belinskiy and this park was named after Belinskiy. On Soviet holidays and weekends people enjoyed walking in this park. Zhmerinka was a big railroad junction and had one of the best railroad stations in the south of Ukraine: it was a big and beautiful stone structure and there were few platforms. There was an underground passage leading to one platform.

Cinema was the main entertainment in Zhmerinka. There were few Soviet movies that they showed many times in a row. We went to watch 'Chapaev' movie as many times as they showed it at the cinema theater. It was the same with the 'We are from Kronshtadt' movie. When the 'Circus' and 'Merry guys' arrived we enjoyed them to the utmost. I liked to sign songs from these movies at our school concerts. I knew all songs by Dunayevskiy [Isaac Dunayevskiy, (1900-1955) a popular Soviet composer, Jew], sung by Utyosov [Leonid Utyosov (1895-1982) popular Soviet singer and movie actor, Jew]: 'A merry song makes us at ease', 'Heart, you don't want to know piece'. I remember every word and every note of this song. Then there was a movie 'Captain Grant's children'. We often watched it. We never got bored with it! Tickets cost 15-20 kopecks: this was nothing. The cinema theater was not far from my house and it was a nice building for a small provincial town. There was an orchestra of 5-6 musicians playing popular melodies in the foyer before a movie. Then the bell rang three times and after it rang the third time the audience went into the hall. I often went to the cinema with my friends and sometimes - with parents.

Two of my close friends - Volodia, Ukrainian, and Shulim, a Jew, lived in my neighborhood. We were good friends. We went to different schools. Although Volodia's father was a railroad man his parents sent him to a Russian school. Shulim also went to the Russian school. We played 'hide-and-seek, played with a ball and a wheel. I gave them books on their birthdays. Their parents offered us tea, cookies and jam on their birthday parties. My friends also came to my birthday parties. Both of my friends perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War.

When I was in the 2nd grade, my father managed to arrange for me to go to a pioneer camp in Odessa. This was my first trip by train when I went by myself. My father asked an acquaintance of him to keep an eye on me and in Odessa my brother Abram who was a student of a technical school in Odessa met me. Abram and I took a tram to Lustdorf (a village near Odessa, present Chernomorka). The pioneer camp was at the seashore. This was the first time I saw the sea and boats. I can still remember this. I started putting down my impressions in my diary to tell my mother and father what I saw. We went to the beach and had meals three or four times a day. I saw Dutch cheese for the first time in my life. We got it for breakfast. It was new food for me and I refused to eat it. Abram visited me few times. He explained to me that it was delicious and very good food. He whispered: 'We don't have it at home. Just eat it'. We were given fruit, grapes, and

butter. I was supposed to spend three weeks in the camp, but I got homesick on the tenth day. I asked my brother: 'Take me home'. He said: 'You are all right here. Nobody does any harm here'. So we counted days together: ten, nine, eight days before going home... I enjoyed it there, but I never learned to swim. I was afraid of the sea (I still am). I stayed at the shore for hours looking at the water and breathing in the sea air.

I became a pioneer in the 3rd grade at the age of 10. I was an active pioneer. It was so interesting! This red necktie! Silk ties were the best. Not everybody could afford one. We didn't tie them round our necks, but there was a special clip. There were three flames on a clip – very beautiful. I loved pioneer meetings. I especially liked dance, sing, or recite at school concerts. On 1 May or on October revolution Day [6](#) someone from the town house of culture attended our school concert and I got an invitation to perform in the town amateur club. I was also a young correspondent of the all-Union newspaper 'Pionerskaya Pravda' (Pioneer Truth) and Ukrainian newspaper 'Yuny Leninet's' (Young Leninist). In the 6th and 7th grades I wrote articles about school life. I corresponded with editorial offices. Of course, these letters were gone when we evacuated. I also liked drawing. Our neighbor taught me to draw portrait copies of Stalin, for example.

I remember some noise by our window one night in 1937 [Great Terror] [7](#). I was 11. In the morning Katia came crying. She said that Ivan Studzinskiy was arrested that night. We never saw him again and they didn't either. Their older son Volodia felt bitter about the Soviet regime and when Germans came he became a policeman. After the war he was sentenced to 5 years in prison. Other brothers Konstantin and Fyodor had nothing to do with occupants.

My brother Abram was 10 years older than me. He was a student when I went to the first grade. He studied in a technical school in Odessa and then went to study in the Chemical Production College of Tinned Food Industry. In 1939, a month after WWII began he went to serve in the army. In 1940 Abram wrote us that his commandment decided to send him to study at a military school. We were happy for him, but some time later he wrote that he got a refusal for having relatives abroad. So he stayed to serve in Brest. A year later in late November he came home on leave to visit mother since she was very ill. She had a severe condition and a group of doctors issued a document confirming her hard health condition and on the basis of this document Abram got a leave. Abram came wearing his military uniform. I was turning 14 on those days, but we didn't have any celebration since my mother was dying. She survived. Doctors helped her. My father invited professor from Vinnitsa who came to Zhmerinka to provide medical treatment to the wife of a Party boss. It turned out that the diagnosis of local doctors was wrong.

Everything my brother told me about his military routines was interesting to me. He said that Brest was located on the banks of the Bug River and there were Germans on the opposite bank. Occasionally soldiers talked across the river. Germans shouted in German and Russian soldiers yelled back in Russian. There was nothing alarming about the situation there. A month later in May 1941 we received the last and alarming card from him. He wrote: 'You know, my dearest, that my service will be over in autumn. We shall see each other soon, but ask God that everything is all right'. This was all we had from him. Ten, fifteen, twenty days passed. Middle of June. We are waiting. Then 22 June came. Then it became clear to us that there would be no letter from him. Since Brest is Brest [The fortress with its Harrison few in number made a prolonged defense against Germans from 22 June through the twenties of July 1941]. However, according to the note my father received in 1943, Abram survived in Brest and was at the front for another year. He

perished in Leningrad region in May 1942. He was 26 years old.

During the war

I remember the beginning of the Great Patriotic War very well. My father managed to go to work as a shop assistant in a store. He worked in it few months. He worked hard. It happened so that on 22 June my father skipped breakfast before going to work. My mother packed his breakfast and asked me to take it to my father. His store was in the center of the town near the railway station. I ran there at about 12 o'clock noon. There were people gathering near a radio on a post and I came nearer as well. I had finished the 7th grade by then, and was a big boy. I heard Molotov's [8](#) speech. I ran into the store. There was a long line as usual at it is hard to think about it even now.

I ran home and told my mother about the war and she thought about my brother in Brest. She turned into a stone from sorrow. Whatever was said in the next days she had only one concern: «Abrasha [affectionate from Abram] is in Brest!» She didn't eat or sleep: 'Abrasha is in Brest!' Zhmerinka was bombed literally one day after the war began. German bombers dropped bombs on the railway station and railcar repair plant. One bomb fell on a platform, but it didn't hit the railway station. There were German landing troopers in Zhmerinka directing German pilots and I happened to meet two of them. On about the tenth day of the war my mother sent me to meet my father from work in the evening. It was getting dark. My father and I were going home. A bomb exploded nearby and I grabbed my father by his jacket. I was scared. Two men wearing railroad uniforms came alongside. They carried cases and one of them said with an accent: 'Are you, boy, scared? This is only a beginning'. I followed them. It was dark and they didn't see me. We went past school building that housed a military hospital. One of them said in German (I studied German at school): 'I wonder is in this building'. My father called me in whisper: 'Let's go. There is a smell of gunpowder in the air'. I think they were the ones who directed German pilots.

Two weeks later, on 9 July, I was helping my father in his store when director of the store ran inside: 'Samuel Abramovich, we've got a railcar. My family is already at the railway station. Hurry up!' The front line was nearing Mogilyov-Podolskiy. We hurried home to pack. My mother was very ill and couldn't carry anything. I went to find a loader, but there was none. My father and I packed two bales. We didn't take any winter clothing. My mother kept telling us that we would be back 10-12 days later. Of course, the Red army would win. When we were leaving my mother made our beds and laid a clean tablecloth on the table. On 9 July we boarded a freight train. We stayed on a reserve track over that night. In the morning men began to make plank beds in the railcar. We departed in the evening. It took us half a month to get to Krasnodarskiy region [about 800 km from Zhmerinka]. The train stopped every few kilometers since they were bombing the track. Few railcars were destroyed on the way. Their passengers perished.

We reached Korenevka station in Krasnodarskiy region. There were wagons there. They rode us to Platnirovka village. We got bread and milk and washed in a bathroom. Then we were accommodated in a house. The owner of the house was a Kazak woman. Her husband was at the front. She was a terrible anti-Semite. We stayed with her three months. She demonstrated her remorse toward us, but she couldn't force us out of her house since we were accommodated by an order of higher authorities. When Germans were near Rostov and Krasnodar she said to my mother: 'Go away, Germans will come tomorrow and kill you!' She believed they would not kill a Kazak woman, but they would kill Jews. She had a small garden. There were huge crops of cherry

plums and I picked few. She called my father and said: 'Tell your son to ask my permission for picking plums!' My father and I were working harvesting grain. There were rich crops. We received bread for our work and they also delivered hot meals to the field. We shared our food with my mother. She was very ill. She had ill stomach. Her suffering during the recent months worsened her condition. The front was nearing and we evacuated again to Northern Ossetia, Zmeyskaya village of Elhotov district. We got accommodation and work in a kolkhoz there. In 1942, when I was about 16 I and other teenage boys and girls and men who were not fit to serve in the army went to construct fortifications in the vicinity of Mozdok town: trenches and escarpments. Military engineers were supervisors of these works. Some people dropped their excavation tools and ran away. I was afraid of running away. We were near the front line. We should be grateful to a colonel: he understood that our group of women, boys and children, might get in encirclement and he ordered: 'Dear people, go away. Few hours from now Germans will be here'. There were hours left. We were 50-60 kilometers from the village where my mother and father were. They had packed by the time I returned and we managed to leave. Again we boarded a freight train. We arrived in Baku [Azerbaijan]. In Baku we waited for our turn to board a boat for five days.

There were crowds of refugees on the shore with their bales and suitcases. We were staying in the open air and this was September. It was already getting colder. Foggy. There was one boat every five or seven days. My mother was getting worse. My father and I went to town to exchange whatever clothes we had for food. Once day we decided to storm on board of the first boat in the harbor. We managed. There was storm in the sea. We didn't have water. We arrived in Krasnovodsk. My mother was asking for some water. I couldn't get any. There was no water in Krasnovodsk. One woman offered a glass of milk instead of water. I gave my mother this milk. In Krasnovodsk we got into a passenger train for the first time since the war began. We didn't know where the train was heading. We crossed Turkmenia and arrived in Stalinabad (present Dushanbe). There were changed for a narrow-gauge railway train and headed across the Pamir [mountainous region of central Asia, located mainly in Tajikistan and extending into NE Afghanistan and SW Xinjiang, China; called roof of the world. Many peaks rise to more than 20,000 ft (6,096 m); Mount Communism (24,590 ft/7,495 m) and Lenin Peak (23,508 ft/7,165 m) are the highest peaks in the Pamir. The region forms a geologic structural knot from which the great Tian Shan, Karakorum, Kunlun, and Hindu Kush mountain systems radiate. Snow-capped throughout the year, the Pamir experiences long cold winters and cool summers] and covered over 100 kilometers over mountainous passes and arrived at Kurgan-Tubeh town [Tajikistan].

As soon as the train arrived at the railway station people wearing white robes appeared there: 'Is anybody ill? We will take them to a hospital. The rest of you will get accommodations, work, etc.' I looked at my father and my father looked at me. What do we do? We didn't feel like letting mother go to hospital, but we had to. We didn't know whether we were getting accommodation, or where we would get one or where we would live before. And my mother was taken to hospital. This happened on 20 October 1942. On the last day of October we came to see her. My father had a pass and he could go inside, but I had to wait at the gate. I saw my mother talking to father at the front door. She had a white kerchief on her head. My mother asked to make her a drink from dry fruit. We went to the market to buy dried fruit and cooked them into a drink, compot. In the morning of 1 November we brought her the compot, but she was in the morgue already. I was to turn 16 in a month. When I started telling somebody what my mother was like I always added that I didn't have time to know what she was like when she deceased. My father and I buried my mother

in the local cemetery. When our landlady got to know that we had just buried my mother she began to comfort us and brought us some tea and flat bread. They were nice people and welcomed us cordially. They gave us a much better reception than we had in Krasnodarskiy region. Unfortunately, I didn't remember their names. They had different names, hard to remember.

My father fell ill with malaria right after my mother died. I also had malaria. All newcomers had it: it was unhealthy climate. Few escaped. I lived there until autumn 1943. Within this year of my life I finished a FZU (factory vocational school). I became a tinsmith, worked for two months before I was mobilized to the army. Young men went to the army at the age of 17 at this height of the war. This was 1943, when Ukraine was to be liberated and Byelorussia and there was a long road to go before the victory. –During the war I served in the army for a year, four months and nineteen days. I remember this duration very well since presently the state counts every day of military service at wartime as three days paying pensions. At that time every day of the war meant thousands of deceased. Every day! Before going to the army I joined Komsomol [9](#). It was mandatory for recruits to become Komsomol members since we were to be trained to go to the front. It was a routinely process: chief of the military registry committee called secretary of the district Komsomol committee and informed him: 'Admit this recruit to Komsomol since we are recruiting him to the army tomorrow'. I served at the border with Afghanistan where we fought basmachi gangs. Those gangs consisted of former kulaks, as Stalin called them, from Central Asia republics who escaped to Afghanistan in the early 1930s during collectivization [10](#). They took advantage of the war situation and engaged us into combat action in the south. I became a sergeant there and had a squad under my command. I had a Russian friend from Leningrad. His name was Gennadiy. He liked playing the guitar and I liked dancing. Gennadiy couldn't dance, so I was giving him dancing classes and taught me elements of playing the guitar. We found a common language. Once, after another combat action he was cleaning his weapon and unintentionally shot himself. He was my age, 17 years old.

In 1944 I was sent to Orenburg infantry school. I was a cadet there for 14 months. I studied well and only had one problem. There was a mandatory item in the curriculum: 'Each officer must learn to swim'. I am afraid of water. My lieutenant said: 'there is a swimming pool. It's not deep. I will push you in the water and will move your hands and you will learn to swim'. I was trying hard, but I never learned to do it. In May 1945 we were finishing our school. I met victory there. I remember this day very well. We lined on the drill square and waited there for an hour. We didn't know anything and were trying to guess: what's happening? Chief of our school came to the square and explained: last night Germany signed its capitulation and the war was over. We began shouting 'Hurrah!' and officers who had guns fired out all their bullets saluting. We had tears of joy in our eyes – from then on there was to be no more killing. We understood that the war was going to last five-ten days more, and everybody knew what kind of work we would be given work. So we met Victory Day and from that day Victory Day has been the dearest holiday for me and also, for my family.

After the war

In 1946 I demobilized from the army. When my father and I met in Kurgan-Tubeh, he cried for the first time. He reached his jacket and showed me a notification on my brother's death. He received it in 1943, but he didn't show it to me. I had quite a temper and my father feared that if I heard that Abram perished I might run away to the front. I would have done it. My father and I returned to Zhmerinka. Again we were having a problem with getting a place to live. My father had been a

pensioner for few years and I began to look for a job. I couldn't find one for a long time. I heard, though that Stalin issued an order obliging all military registry offices to find employment for veterans of the war. My registry office argued with me: 'We didn't recruit you, an office in Kurgan-Tubeh did'. I replied: 'That's true. You didn't, but I was born here and studied here. I came back to my hometown'. 'We are having problems with employment and we can help only those who had been recruited here'. I don't know what might come out of it if I hadn't met my friend who invited me to visit his relatives in Komargorod village where he promised to introduce me to a nice Jewish girl.

We met in 1946 and in 1947 we registered our marriage. My wife Raisa Shraiman was born in Komargorod village Toimashpol district Vinnitsa region in 1927. Her father Moisey Shraiman was a tinsmith and her mother Rosa Shraiman was a dressmaker. Raisa had an older brother, born in 1924. They were in the ghetto from the first days and were liberated when Tomashpol district was cleared in middle March 1944. What they lived through would be enough to write a novel. I will tell you one episode. Occupants forced all Jewish families into few houses. They made those miserable people to install barbed wire fencing. Some time later a punitive force unit arrived at Komargorod. They ordered few men to dig a big pit in a small forest near the village. My wife's father Moisey Shraiman was among those men doing this work. Then they returned to the ghetto and some time later in the evening they came to take eight men including Raisa's father. They tied them in twos, hand by hand. Four pairs. They took them to the pit. Moisey understood immediately what was going on. He whispered to his companion that they had to try to escape. His companion refused. Moisey managed to untie his knot and escape few meters away from the pit. He ran to the woods and Germans fired after him, but it was getting dark and he managed to run away. The rest of men were killed. There was a sovkhos farm near the forest where Moisey took shelter in a box with cattle food. He didn't remember how many days he stayed in this box. He remembered that some young people from a neighboring village opened this box and saw him there. They gave him a lump of sugar and a piece of bread. He had a passport with him. Moisey asked those guys to take this passport to his wife Rosa and tell her that he was alive. Later he returned to the ghetto. They didn't come after him again. This was the only shooting in the ghetto. In Tomashpol they shot over one hundred people. After Komargorod was liberated Raisa's brother Leonid was recruited to the army. He took part in action in Romania, Austria and Hungary. He returned an invalid from the war. He worked as a schoolteacher in Komargorod and then in Cherkassy. He died in 1985.

After we got married we lived in Raisa parents' house. I occasionally visited my father in Zhmerinka. Komargorod was a big village, about five thousand residents. I know this number since I was a member of electoral commission on all elections. There were few hundred Jews in the village before the war. There was a Jewish kolkhoz named after Petrovskiy [11](#). When I got married there were about one hundred Jews in the village. The kolkhoz was not Jewish any more. Jews took to other crafts: two Jewish families were in sewing business, two families of tinsmiths, few Jews worked in the village department store and few Jews were teachers. There was a kolkhoz, sovkhos, a big hospital, an agricultural school and a big part established by landlord Balashov before the revolution in the village. However, there was no electricity before 1968 in the village. So we lived with kerosene lamps. Raisa's mother liked to embroider or sew in the evening. I prepared for my classes at school and my sons did their homework.

My wife's family was more religious than mine. Although they didn't have anything after the war they began to save every kopeck to buy crockery. There were to be plates for Pesach and plates for everyday use. There were to be plates for meat and for dairy products. My wife still follows these rules. My sons were circumcised on the eighth day like we used to do it at home. I didn't get involved in those proceedings since following my Komsomol membership I became a Party member.

After we got married I went to work as senior pioneer tutor in the local school. I taught children singing, dancing, drawing and made pioneer fires for them. Everything that I was so fond of in my childhood. I was one of the best pioneer tutors in Vinnitsa region. I had awards for my accomplishments. I was a member of the teachers' team at school, but I had to study to work at school. I studied in a physical culture school for four years and then I became a teacher of physical culture. Then I entered extramural department of the Historical Faculty of Odessa University. I had two sons by the time I finished it.

Our first baby Alexandr was born in 1948 and then Leonid was born in 1953.

I joined the party in 1952, at the period when 'doctors' plot' [12](#) was at its height. This was a splash of anti-Semitism and you should have seen how they jeered at me at the ceremony of admission to VKP(b) (All-Union Party of Bolsheviks). It's hard to find words to describe it! I was born Grigoriy and everybody called me by this name, though my parents knew that I wasn't Grigoriy. One of the Party bureau members asked me all of a sudden: 'What's your real name?' I said: 'Grigoriy'. 'And your patronymic? 'Samuelovich'. 'No, you tell us the truth. Why would you want to hide it? Just tell us your name'. I said: 'This is the only name I have'. They wanted me to pronounce the name of Gershl. Anyway, they admitted me. Chairman of the village council and chairman of the kolkhoz gave me recommendations to join the Party. They were both Ukrainian. Two recommendations were required. The third recommendation was to be issued by the Party district committee. I had three recommendations and they had nothing else to do, but admit me, but those provocative questions! 'When was the last time you worked electors? - 'I was an agitator-propagandist in a tractor operators crew. They pounced on me 'He hasn't met with his people for 48 hours! You should have talked with them yesterday! You should have seen them today! And you only were there the day before yesterday'. The situation was terrible at the time: director of school was a Jew, he got fired, chief of district department of education was a Jew and he was fired, chief of financial department of the district military office, captain, was a Jew and was fired. On one of those days they told me to make my appearance at the bureau of the district Komsomol committee. By that time I was one of the best pioneer tutors and I taught physical culture. The bureau jerked on me and threatened to fire me from my position of senior pioneer tutor. That meant depriving me of my piece of bread. They were just following instructions of higher authorities. About ten years later I met with those people and they told me they were forced to do this and in truth, they didn't have anything against me personally.

I also remember another episode in 1952. A lecturer came from Vinnitsa. Kolkhoz members, agronomists, teachers and students of technical school gathered at the club. There were about 150 of us there. The lecturer spoke about 'monsters in white robes who received a task from the government of Israel to destroy the soviet government', and so on and so forth. So, when the lecture was over one teacher expressed her admiration: 'What a lecture! I wish we had more of such lectures! They've opened our eyes on where the evil generates!' Here you are: this is anti-

Semitism. She was an ordinary teacher. After Stalin's death when this campaign crashed my wife's brother Leonid asked this teacher: 'What do you say now?' – 'Well, you know this was the way it was at the time'. Everybody calmed down and we continued to work in team. I worked in this Komargorod village from 1947 till 1969.

When Stalin died in March 1953 I wore a mourning armband for three days like everybody else. It couldn't have been otherwise. The leader! The leader of the state. Generalissimos! Stalin became the leader of our country before we were born. We were raised with the name of Stalin. Stalin in the army and Stalin, Stalin everywhere. We thought the world was to turn upside down. This was all to it! Life couldn't go on! Stalin was not there and it meant that there could be nothing else!

In 1956, by the time of the 20th Party Congress [13](#), I had been a member of the Party few years. In February 1956 we were invited to a Party meeting at 8 o'clock in the evening. –This meeting lasted until 2 o'clock in the morning. They read Khrushchev's [14](#) report to us about who Stalin was and who was Beriia [15](#), and so on and so forth. They told us that what we were going to hear was not to be disclosed. Later newspapers published it. They couldn't keep it a secret for longer. People got to know about it. It was a shock. We sincerely believed that Stalin was not guilty for arrests and that Stalin didn't know about them. If he had known, he wouldn't have allowed them.

My father lived in Zhmerinka. In 1946 he met an aging Jewish woman named Lisa. Her husband perished at the front. They began to live together. Shortly afterward Lisa's brother living in Alchevsk Donetsk region took them to his town and rented an apartment from nice people for them. My father lived with Lisa the last seven years of his life in Alchevsk. I visited him once. When my son Alexandr was ten years old I went to see my father. My second visit to Alchevsk was when I came to my father's funeral in 1959. There was a civil funeral and my father was buried in the Jewish cemetery. I never went there again.

In 1960s I had a full workload at school. I also conducted extra-curriculum activities. I also taught in senior classes where they paid more. I got five, ten years of employment records at school and they gave a raise of salary for the duration of school employment. We lived with my wife's parents and we all contributed our salaries into our common family budget. We also had a vegetable garden where we grew potatoes. There was a food store and a market in the village. We bought our first TV in 1968 after power supply wiring was installed in Komargorod. Our family was the first one to buy a TV set. We bought it on installments. I had seen a TV before when I went to take my exams in Odessa University. Our neighbors came to watch our TV. Our son had their characters, but they were kind to people, obedient and disciplined. Alexandr went to school in 1955 and Leonid - in 1961. They studied with all excellent marks in my school. They had many friends. They spent their vacations at home for the most part. They were not demanding about buying things. They understood our possibilities. We celebrated Soviet holidays: 1 May, October revolution Day and Victory Day. New Year was a family holiday. We decorated a New Year tree when our sons were small.

After the ninth form Alexandr entered the Assistant Doctor Faculty in the medical School in Odessa. After finishing school he was recruited to the army. He served as chief of sanitary services in strategic Rocket army in Moscow regiment until 1971. After the army Alexandr worked in the ambulance unit in Mogilyov-Podolskiy for a long time. He married Inna, a Jewish girl. In 1972 their daughter Maya was born. They received miserable salaries. They earned 150 rubles per month: he,

and his wife who was a nurse. Work in ambulance is very hard: he had to be a surgeon and a therapist or whoever else in one person. A small salary and huge responsibility. Alexandr got tired of this miserable salary and he volunteered to the army. He served as an ensign of medical services in Kleipeda. He received an apartment there and in 1978 their second daughter Svetlana was born.

In 1969 my wife, her mother Rosa Shraiman and my younger son Leonid moved to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My father-in-law Moisey Shraiman died in 1955. In Mogilyov-Podolskiy we lived 8 years. We moved to Odessa in 1977. We bought this apartment where my wife and I live now. It's our property. In Odessa I worked as a teacher at the railroad training school for locomotive operators. I taught political economy, basics of political studies and civil defense. I worked there teaching these three subjects for 12 years. I retired at the age of 62 in 1988.

My younger son Leonid studied in the evening school for working young people in Mogilyov-Podolskiy and worked as a laborer at the tinned food factory. After this school he entered Odessa School of Railroad Transport and finished it with a 'red' diploma [Diploma with a red cover issued to graduates that had all excellent marks. Other diplomas had a blue cover], and his profession was refrigeration car mechanic. He decided to continue his education and submitted documents to the Faculty of Public Economy Planning of the Odessa College of Public Economy. Since he had a 'red' diploma he was to take one exam and skip the others if he passed it with an excellent mark. He lost three kilograms in one day before this exam. By that time, by that time, we already knew that there were limitations to the number of Jewish students. If he received a '4' in his exams he was to take all other exams. And they would pluck him for sure at one of them. When he came out of the examination room and said that he had a '5' he was on the edge of fainting. So was I. He finished his college successfully in 1978 and was allowed to choose his job assignment [16](#) location being one of the best graduates. He chose Odessa footwear association. He worked as a rate-setting engineer. Few months after he started work he was recruited to the army. He served in Odessa regiment in the Crimea. After the army he returned to his factory. He was appointed a shop superintendent within a short period of time. Then he met Natasha Yudavina, a Jewish girl, who was an accountant in this association. Leonid was 28 years old and Natasha was nine years his junior. They got married in 1982. After the wedding they lived with Natasha's parents for some time. In 1983 their son Boris was born and they received an apartment in Frunze Street. In 1989 their second son Ruslan was born. Leonid became general director of the shoe association. During perestroika [17](#) the association crashed and he became unemployed. He received an unemployment allowance until he found a job of an economist on the outskirts of Odessa. In 1999 Leonid won competition for the position of assistant director in the Gemilut Hesed, a Jewish charity association in Odessa. V. Goldman, director of the association died in 2002 Leonid became director of Gemilut Hesed. His older son Boris studies in Odessa Academy of public Economy and his younger son Ruslan studies in the Jewish religious school 'Or Sameach' [18](#).

When in 1985 Gorbachev [19](#) came to power and perestroika began I was working as a teacher in the school for locomotive operators. My salary was 180 rubles before Gorbachev and it remained 180 rubles during his rule. Nothing changed in material way, but it was a different story when the USSR broke up [20](#) in 1991. This was liquidation of people's lifetime savings. When my wife turned 55 in 1982 she began to receive a beggar's pension of 15 rubles. We decided to deposit this pension to a bank when the USSR burst apart and so did our savings. Everybody in the country

suffered at this time. Now the situation is different: there is mass unemployment and it has its impact on every family. A big state was created through centuries: by fair means or foul they managed to make it, but then they broke it apart. Ukraine became independent, but does it move ahead? What's going on now? Chairman of Verkhovna Rada [Ukrainian Parliament] Has to close up their session because they begin to fight. They really begin to fight! Now they are thinking of having a group of police officers to help out the deputies who interfere with the legislation generation process. So there we are: this is independence.

In 1990 my older son Alexandr and his family moved to Odessa and settled down in Slobodka [Neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. His older daughter Maya got married. She has a son. Her husband was eager to move to Israel and they left here in 1995. Alexandr's younger daughter Svetlana followed them in 1997. When their both daughters were in Israel, Alexandr and his wife Inna decided to join them there. We all do sympathize with Israel very much, but when we discussed this issue in our family Leonid strongly refused to go to live there and my wife and I also wanted to stay here. Alexandr and Inna hesitated for a long time, but three years after Svetlana move there they went to Israel. Maya and her family and Inna and Alexandr live together in Migdal Haemek town in the north of Israel. Svetlana graduated from University in Haifa and married a former resident of Vinnitsa region. His name is Yuriy and he is a Jew. In late 2002 Svetlana and Yuriy won a 'green card' lottery for residence in USA. Again there was consideration in the family. Should they go or should they ignore this card? In March last year Svetlana and Yuriy moved to USA. They live and work in San Francisco. Yuriy is a computer programmer and Svetlana also works in a company. They are happy now.

Perestroika gave a start to the rebirth of Jewish life in our town. I remember the first meeting of the Jewish community in the cinema theater 'Sickle and hammer' in Mizikevich Street in 1993. The situation was still alarming and we were guarded by a militia unit so that nothing happened, God forbid. The association of Jewish culture was established. Ten years passed. There are few dozens of such organizations and I can't even name all of them. There are even more of them than needed. There used to be two hundred thousand Jews living in Odessa at some time and then there was fifty thousand of Jewish residents, but not now. However, there are two rabbis in Odessa. I think one would be sufficient.

My wife and I enjoy assistance of Gemilut Hesed. She receives monthly food packages as a former ghetto inmate. Sometimes the courier asks us: 'Would you like me to help you with cleaning the house?' We can still manage ourselves, though. When the synagogue in Osipov Street in the center of the town began to operate my wife and I went there on holidays several times, but in January 1998 I had a second heart attack. They actually returned me to life from another world. I stayed in the Jewish hospital 20 days after this heart attack. On the eve of my release from the hospital I had another heart attack. After this we didn't go out since it's difficult for me to seat somewhere for a long time.

Glossary

1 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which

came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

2 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.

3 Romanian occupation of Odessa

Romanian troops occupied Odessa in October 1941. They immediately enforced anti-Jewish measures. Following the Antonescu-ordered slaughter of the Jews of Odessa, the Romanian occupation authorities deported the survivors to camps in the Golta district: 54,000 to the Bogdanovka camp, 18,000 to the Akhmetchetka camp, and 8,000 to the Domanevka camp. In Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot, with the Romanian gendarmerie, the Ukrainian police, and Sonderkommando R, made up of Volksdeutsche, taking part. In January and February 1942, 12,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered in the two other camps. A total of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered by Romanian and German army units.

4 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.

5 Torgsin stores

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

6 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.

7 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.

8 Molotov, V

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

9 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

10 Collectivization in the USSR

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

11 Jewish collective farms

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

12 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.

13 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

14 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

15 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

16 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.

17 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.

18 Or Sameach school in Odessa

Founded in 1994, this was the first private Jewish school in the city after Ukraine became independent. The language of teaching is Russian, and Hebrew and Jewish traditions are also taught. The school consists of a co-educational primary school and a secondary school separate for boys and for girls. It has about 500 pupils every year.

19 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

20 Breakup of the USSR

Yeltsin in 1991 signed a deal with Russia's neighbours that formalized the break up of the Soviet Union. The USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).