# Natalia Zilberman Biography

NATALIA ZILBERMAN
UKRAINE
KIEV
Interviewer: Inna Zlotnik

Natalia Zilberman lives in a two-room apartment in Pushkinskaya Street in the center of Kiev. She is a tall stately woman with thick gray hair and gray eyes. She must have been beautiful. She can only move in her apartment with a go-cart. She has a poor sight and ear. She is a very tiny lady with a nice hairdo.
She has two spacious rooms in her apartment. There is a Becker piano in the living room (she keeps photos of her relatives and old statues on it). In the middle of the room there is an old pre-revolutionary mirror in a black frame. She has brought the piano and mirror from Nemirov. On the walls there are big heavily framed pictures of the beginning of the 20th century. The pictures were brought from Uglich after Naum, her mother's brother, died. Natalia likes playing the piano. There are professional and classic Russian and foreign in Yiddish on her bookshelves. She leased her 2nd room to a girl.

My grandfather on my father's side Haim Milimevker was a kohen. This is what my father told me. Kohen is descendant of the ancient priestly class, the progeny of Aaron. He was born in Lutsk in 1849 and lived there his whole life. Lutsk belonged to Russia at that time. In ancient times it was occupied by Lithuanian lords and later – by Poland. The population in Lutsk was Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian. In the middle of XIX century the majority of the population in Lutsk was Jewish. Jews were involved in commerce and handicrafts. My grandfather finished cheder and that was all education he could afford. He became a mechanic: he was very handy and could repair or fix items that broke in the factory or at the mill. He had a horse and a cart and went to where his services were required. He was a kohen and this gave him the right to be the first to come near the Torah. My father told me that my grandfather was very religious. They observed all Jewish traditions in his family: followed the kashrut and celebrated all Jewish holidays and Shabbat, fasted at Yom Kippur (only small children were released from this duty). Boys in the family studied at cheder. On Saturday and on holidays parents and boys went to synagogue.

My grandmother on my father's side Ginda Milimevker was born to a poor family in Lutsk in 1850s. My grandparents had 7 children. My father Duvid Milimevker was the oldest. He was born in 1878. At 3 he went to cheder. In autumn or winter there was a carrier that carried kids to the cheder on his back and front and on the sides. It wasn't too far – just few blocks.
Then came the sisters: Manya, born in 1881 and Revekka, born in 1882. They were pretty girls. They had a teacher teaching them at home. When Revekka grew a little older a neighbor boy fell in love with her, but Revekka didn't care about him. In some time this boy's uncle took the boy to the US. The girls were growing up pretty and smart. Some time later a student of law settled down in the neighborhood. He pad addresses to Revekka and she fell in love with him, but he switched to Manya all of a sudden. Revekka felt hurt. She wrote to the boy in America that was in love with her. He sent her money for the ticket and she moved to America. They got married and lived a very

happy life. They have a daughter Silva. They lived in Toledo and then moved to Los Angeles. Manya married the lawyer and they had 4 children: two sons – Pepo and Emil and two daughters – Anka and Ruzia. Manya's husband died of typhoid when he was still young. Manya and her children lived in Lutsk. This was Poland in 1920s and we couldn't see each other. My father used to send his mother and Manya 25 rubles every month.

In 1884 my father's brother Mihel was born and in two years – Yankel. They both finished cheder. Michel was good at music, he sang in the choir at the synagogue and became a violinist. He had a wife Malka and two sons: Haim and Naum. Yankel was very handy and became a mechanic. He had a wife and 2 children: Anna and Aron. Michel and Yankel lived in Lutsk. In the first days of the war (1941) they were all killed by Germans and so was grandmother Ginda.

My father's youngest brother Boris was born in 1888. He finished cheder, but his parents couldn't afford to pay for his further education. My father worked as dentist in Nemirov at that time. He took his brother and hired a teacher for him. In two years' time he passed exams for a complete course of grammar school. My father taught him dentistry and he passed exams for this profession. Later Boris got married and moved to Saratov with his family. He had two sons: Efim and Jacob. In Saratov he worked as deputy director of dentist school for over 30 years.

Only my father's brother Boris survived the war. He died in Saratov in 1964. His younger son Jacob lives in Volgograd. He is a construction engineer. His wife is Russian. Their daughter is a doctor. Pepo, Manya, Anka and Ruzia evacuated to Middle East during the war. They were in the Anders army (Editor's note: Polish army), then moved to Israel and took their part in the establishment of Israel in 1948. After the war Anka's friend from New York invited her to visit her in the US. Anka went and got married there. I've seen the photo of Anka on her wedding at the shore of an ocean. At 43 she had a daughter. At a time I corresponded with them – they wrote me in English, but then we stopped writing letters somehow. Anka gave our address to Ruzia and Ruzia invited us to Israel. But we didn't go and in 1992 she visited us and stayed two weeks. Pepo lived in Tel-Aviv after the war. We corresponded with him. Pepo died in Tel-Aviv in 1992. My father's youngest sister Basia was born in 1890. She was a very pretty and cheerful girl, but she died of diphtheria at 3.

In 1891 when my father was 13 he had a Barmitzva. In a month after the ritual his father died of pneumonia at the age of 42. My father was the oldest and had to provide for the family. He took all kinds of jobs to earn for his family. He was a porter, baker, fireman. Later he finished grammar school in Lutsk and then – dentist school at Moscow University. In 1901 my father went to Nemirov and became assistant dentist. At the beginning of XIX century Nemirov belonged to Poland and was residence of Bratzlav khasids. At the end of XIX century the town joined Russia and became part of restricted residential area. There was Polish, Ukrainian and Russian population, but the majority of it was Jewish. There were several synagogues and a Christian church in this town. The Jewish population consisted of tradesmen and handicraftsmen. They owned stores and shop located mainly in their own houses. They bought food products from farmers.

In 1903 my father met my mother. The two of them were waiting for a train at the station. They chatted a little and then exchanged addresses. They wrote letters to one another and in 1904 rthey got married. My parents didn't tell me any details, but I believe they had a traditional Jewish wedding. It couldn't have been otherwise at that time.

My mother Anna Milimevker -nee Gologorskaya - was born in Kamenets-Podolskiy, Russia, in 1880. In the end of XIX century Kamenets-Podolskiy was one of the khasid centers. It was a bigger town for its time. There were big stores, churches, synagogues, a big theater and a market where on Sunday farmers from the surrounding villages brought their products. Jews constituted almost half of the population of the town. They were involved in commerce and handicrafts. My mother's father Yankel Gologorskiy was born in Kamenets-Podolskiy in 1838. He was a merchant, but he died when he was young and the family became very poor. My grandmother Gitl Gologorskaya (nee Shor) was born in Berdichev in 1844. The Shors owned all leather industry in Ukraine. Berdichev was a big agricultural trade center. Jews were also involved in handicrafts. My grandmother got married to Gologorskiy when she was 17.

Their older daughter Lisa was born in 1862. Lisa finished grammar school and entered the conservatory in Petersburg. Her husband Shymon came from Ekaterinoslav. They moved to Ekaterinoslav in the end of XIX century. Lisa died in 1939. They didn't have any children.

In 1864 Menashe was born. He finished cheder and grammar school and studied at the Faculty of Technology in Petersburg University. At 21 he fell ill with galloping consumption and died in Petersburg in 1885. Joseph, two years younger than Menashe, also finished cheder and grammar school. He graduated from Medical faculty of Petersburg University and worked as a doctor in Tarascha. He was married and had two daughters: Milia and Lisa. There was another child next to Joseph that died in infantry. In 1870 Clara was born. She finished grammar school and dentist school in Warsaw. She married Joseph Gutberts, a dentist, and they moved to Tula. Clara had two sons: Jacob and Michael. Her husband died soon and never remarried. She worked as a dentist in Tula.

After Clara came Aron born in 1874. He had spinal tuberculosis and had to stay in a special bed for many years. By 22 he passed exams for a grammar school. At that time my mother also finished grammar school and wanted to continue her studies in Switzerland, but her family couldn't afford it. She gave private classes to other students for 5 golden rubles per class. She worked so for 3 years. When she saved a sufficient amount her mother told her to share it with Aron, because he needed a profession to provide for himself. Anna obeyed and went to Warsaw with Aron where they both finished a dentist school. After finishing it Aron fell very ill and his brother Joseph took him to Tarascha to look after him. Aron died in 1912.

The next after Aron was Naum born in 1877. He finished cheder and grammar school. Then he finished dentist school in Warsaw, got married and went to Uglich. He was a very rich man. He had two houses richly furnished, very expensive dish sets and good pictures. He died in Uglich in 1961. My mother Anna was the youngest. Only Clara and Naum of all mother's brothers and sisters survived the war. Joseph perished in Tarascha during the Holocaust. Lisa died in Ekaterinoslav in 1939.

My mother's family was very close. They always supported one another and older children took care of the younger ones. In that way they managed to get good education and professions.
My grandmother Gitl observed all Jewish traditions. They spoke Yiddish in the family. My mother told me that grandmother went to synagogue with the children, lit candles and celebrated Shabbat with the children. My mother remembered the ritual of Barmitzva for Naum. All brothers but Aron finished cheder. Joseph was teaching Aron. Grandmother and older children fasted at Yom Kippur. I

didn’t ask my mother about any details. I grew up an atheist and wasn’t interested in such description.

When my parents got married in 1904 my mother moved to Nemirov, with grandmother. All other children had their own life. Only my mother stayed with grandmother who lived with them until her death in 1916. My father lived and worked as dentist in Nemirov. My father rented half a building in Lipkoskaya Street near the cathedral. My parents worked as dentists and bought a house in aristocratic neighborhood in 1913. The street was lined with lime trees that spread wonderful odor when they were blooming in the end of June.

I was born on 20 October 1918. My parents had 3 boy babies before me that all died at birth. My mother was 38 and my father was 40 when I was born. They were eager to have a baby and went to Orlov clinic in Odessa to make sure I was born safely. My mother was sure she was going to have a boy and she even had a name for him. She was planning to name him Vitaly after her mother Gitl – Gitalia that died in 1916. When I was born I was named Natalia after my grandmother. In 10 days my parents were on the train to Nemirov. There were no vacant seat on the train and my father managed to find one for my mother and he was standing all the way holding me. We lived in a big brick house with a high porch of 8 stairs. There was a big living room (60 square meters). There was oak furniture set upholstered with green plush. It consisted of a divan, two armchairs and two settees. There was a dinner table and a low tea table with a samovar on it. There was also a carved oak cupboard with crystal glass and a beautiful light brown grand piano. My father liked to play it and so did I later on. There were two fireplaces in the living room. The ceilings in the house were about 5 meters high. In my parents’ bedroom there were two big beds, my mother's dressing table and a green plush padded stool. My room was smaller. There was a wooden bed in it cover with a nice woven bedspread, a color woolen carpet on the floor, a low table and two chairs. I had a beautiful doll that my mother brought me from Tarascha. My mother’s brother Joseph had two daughters: Mila was 13 and Lisa was 11 when I was born. It was their doll and doll’s furniture that I they gave me. The doll closed its eyes and said “mama”. There was another room in the house that served as my mother’s office. She received her patients there. My father had a classroom where he conducted classes. His training course lasted two years. A standard dentist course lasted 3 years, but my father gave it to his students in two years and then they passed their exams to obtain an official certificate. My father’s former students worked in Mexico, US, Kiev, Lugansk and Nemirov. My mother had housemaids in the house. She had patients and her working day began at 8 in the morning, so she didn’t have time for any housework. My mother was very loyal with housemaids. Through my childhood we had two housemaids: they were both Ukrainian country girls. The first one Vassilisa got married later and the next one after her was Marussia. They weren’t rich, but these girls that came from a village looking for work charged very little for their services and were glad to have a job.

There was also a guest room in the house. My mother’s favorite friend Esfir used to live there for years. Her husband Mark Golovchiner, a doctor, got typhoid from his patient and died.
There were two other rooms that my parents leased to a young couple of teachers of the Jewish school: Fania Muger and Yasha Kachman. In 1929 their daughter Nadia was born. I just adored her. There was a small outhouse in the garden where our gardener Philimon lived. We had beautiful garden with exotic dwarf trees and fruit trees. There were marvelous flowerbeds with roses, phlox flowers and narcissus. There was a small water pool with yellow lilies around it.

My parents told me that back in 1919 they found out that there was going to be a pogrom in Nemirov. My father had a friend – director of the cable factory located in 5 km from Nemirov. He promised to give shelter to my mother and me. My father brought us there, but the pogrom took place in the poorer Jewish neighborhood and we returned home safely.

We spoke Russian in our family. My mother knew Yiddish a little, but in her family they also spoke Russian. My father spoke Yiddish and taught me a little. I learned to read at 4. My mother also began to teach me to write, but I didn't want to learn. We had our classes late at night and I always pretended that I was hungry or tired.

My father was very talented. He was fond of acting. He was head of drama club in Nemirov. He wrote a play "Deprived of civil rights" about a Jewish girl that couldn't make her way in life because she was a Jew. My father also wrote musical comedies "A Young Wife", "Fiancés. They often rehearsed in our living room. My father was fond of playing preference and billiards.

I would like to tell you what kind of person my father was. When I was 7 my father, my mother and I were having lunch. My friend Mera was waiting for me on the porch. Between the courses I ran to look how Mera was doing. I looked into the window and saw a cab passing by when a bag fell off it. The cab driver jumped off to pick it up when his wallet fell out of his pocket. The cab rode on and I shouted to Mera to pick up the wallet while the cab was still in sight. But she didn't notice the wallet. I ran out, picked up the wallet and ran to my father. He looked in and exclaimed "Wow, there is enough money to buy two cows – it's a lot of money!" He and I ran after the cab asking all passers by whether they had seen it. We finally reached the forge where I saw the cabman and I told my father that he was the man that dropped his wallet. My father asked him whether it was his wallet and the cabman said to him "What do you want, man, don't you see I'm busy?". My father gave him his wallet and we went home. The cabman was so confused that he didn't even say "thank you". That was what Duvid Milimevker was like.

My mother also had her talents. She was very intelligent and spoke fluent French. Princess Maria Scherbatova often sent her cab to pick up my mother and take her to the Princess' house. She loved my mother's company. The Princess was Prince Pototskiy's (Editor's note: Pototskiy was one of the richest aristocratic families in Poland) daughter. She married Prince Scherbatov, an ancestor of a Russian aristocratic family of the Scherbatovs and a son of Prince Nikolay Scherbatov, the philosopher and became a Christian. They were a noble family and were very selective about who to invite to spend time with them. Count Pototskiy built a synagogue, a cathedral, a church and a grammar school in Nemirov. His family contributed a lot of money to charity helping orphan children and sick people.
My parents were very critical about the Soviet power. They were smart people and believed that they deserved a more successful and happy life. They wished they could have their own clientele and their own business rater than working for a miserable salary. My father daydreamed about theater, but there was no theater in Nemirov and nobody seemed to care about Jewish art. My parents didn't discuss such issues in my presence, but I still heard bits of their conversation.

My parents only observed few Jewish traditions, but they were more atheistic than religious. However, they celebrated Pesach. They bought matsah and cleaned up the house the day before Pesach. Then they sterilized household utensils with heated copper balls that they dropped into water. We had beautiful dishes that were only used at Pesach. We also had special dark blue wine

glasses and one special wine glass that was on the table but nobody drank from it. My father said the wine in this glass was for Elijah . I always waited for him to come, but never saw him. I also remember clear soup with kneidlech from matsah flour. Once I saw some boys carrying red apples outside. I asked my father what it was and he just said “It’s a Jewish holiday and the boys are carrying apples”. I believe it was Chanukah.
There was a synagogue in Malobazarnaya Street not far from our house where I used to run with children. My friend Clara Gorwitz and her grandparents lived near the synagogue. I often visited them and her grandmother treated me to sweet and sour stew. Then Clara and I went to the synagogue once a week or even more often. Men were praying there on the 1st floor and women – on the balcony. My mother had a book of prayers in Russian. She put on a fancy dress and a hat and went to the synagogue on holidays. The synagogue was painted red on the outside. The main synagogue built by Pototskiy in Podol was a huge two or three storied building with a white-&-blue façade, but I didn’t go there – it was too far from our house.

Before school I took walks with a Frebel teacher - a young lady that finished Frebel school. She had a group of 5- 6 children. I remember how we walked in the park and she taught us French and names of trees and flowers. There was a marvelous park of Princess Scherbatova in the town. There was a flower garden in the center, marble statues and Italian trees in the park. It was so beautiful with all pine an oak trees. The Princess, her son and daughter lived in the palace before the revolution and Prince Scherbatov resided in Paris. The Princess always supported the poor. Before arrival of a Red army unit to Nemirov some local Jews came to offer the Princess to give her shelter in their houses, but she refused saying that she had only done good for everybody and had nothing to be afraid of. When the Red army unit arrived they shot the Princess, her daughter and relative on the lawn in front of the house. The young Prince escaped and the forester gave him shelter in his house. Some time later the forester killed him with an ax and removed his golden dental bridge. After the revolution there was a sanatorium in the palace and my mother worked there as a dentist.

In 1925 I went to the Ukrainian secondary school. I didn’t go to the Jewish school because I didn’t know Yiddish. The school was located in the former estate of Princess Scherbatova. At school I became a pioneer, but I don’t remember any activities or anything interesting in this regard. There were Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish children at school. We didn’t care a bit about nationality. I had quite a few Russian friends. We are still friends with one of my Jewish friends – Syutka Finkelshtein. I was a lazy pupil in junior classes. We had many books at home. They were my parents’ professional books and classic books by Tolstoy, Kuprin, Chekhov. I don’t remember any Jewish books at home.

When I was 9 my mother took me to the seashore in Odessa where I fell ill with malaria. I almost died and I can still remember painful quinine injections. After this happened my mother stopped traveling with me. I can still play the piano. I had almost ideal ear and my parents hired a teacher for me. In 1932 I finished lower secondary school 7 years. Thee was no music school in Nemirov. My mother and I went to Vinnitsa, about 50 km from Nemirov, where I entered music college. When we went back home we received a notification that the music college was moving from Vinnitsa to Kamenets-Podolskiy. It was too far away from Nemirov. Besides, the authorities opened high schools in Nemirov and my mother told me to continue education at high school. When I came to my class on 1 September Tania Sekunova, the best student at schooltold me to share the desk with

her. I sat beside her and my attitude towards studying changed radically. I became one of best students.

Our class sat in the former church building and there was a harmonium there. During intervals girls asked me to play. I played polka, waltz, and they all danced.

In 1932 NKVD officers came to our house with search. They were looking for weapons. There were no weapons in our house, but they took away all our valuables: my father's watch that he had received for "Rescue activities during fire", I don't know any details only that he received it during the tsarist regime when he rescued someone during a fire, my mother's golden watch on a chain with the engraving "From a grateful student", rings, my mother's golden medal that she was awarded after finishing school and my father's box with pieces of gold.

My father was arrested. When he asked what where the charges they replied that they believed he knew who had gold in the neighborhood. They kept him in prison for two weeks. NKVD office was the next house to ours and I climbed over our fence into their yard and crawled to the window of the cell where they were keeping my father. My mother was afraid to go there. There was another inmate sharing the cell with my father. That man, an agricultural specialist, killed his wife, his 2-year old son and 7-year old stepson with an ax and threw their bodies into a silage pit. My father shared his food with him. He said he wasn't stupid, but that he was probably crazy. In two weeks a new chief of NKVD office was appointed and he released my father. My father came home with a gray beard. His hair grew gray while he was in prison. They didn't torture him, but being an inmate of a prison and stay in the same cell with a murderer was far too much for a decent and honest man that my father was. He fell on a chair and burst into tears. So you can imagine that my parents couldn't accept this regime.

During famine in 1933 my mother was working at the railroad medical facility and received 8 kg of corn flour per month. This saved us from starvation. I remember dead people lying in the streets – this was so awful. The daughter of our former gardener Philimon used to come beg for food and my father always gave her something. Philimon lived in a village near Nemirov. Some time later my father heard from an acquaintance that Philimon had died a long while before and his daughter begged for herself. My father was upset with this news and my mother commented that it was not decent on her part to behave in this manner. My father told her to keep quiet because she didn't know what it was like to starve.

In 1935 I finished lower secondary school -8 years with highest grades. There were 3 best students in our class: Tania Sekunova, Itzyk Shoihet and I. I entered Kiev Medical Institute. I rented a room in Rognedinskaya Street and earned my living by making injections as my mother taught me to my neighbors and acquaintances. My parents also supported me.

That year Revekka, the daughter of my father's sister Manya, came on a visit from America. She was in Lutsk and then in Kiev. Manya's son Pepo got business education and Emil was a musician. He played saxophone. Revekka and her husband took Emil to America pretending that he was their daughter Silva's fiancé. This pro forma marriage became a real one. They had two sons, but we stayed out of touch with them.

In 1937 went past our family, but it affected my cousin Lisa. Her husband Aron, born in 1902 became a communist party member in 1918. He was in the Red army, but in 1937 he was arrested and shot. The father of my classmate Odia Serdyuk that was chief accountant of Nemirov forestry was also arrested and shot in 1937.

I met a young man in Nemirov when I was 16. Odia Serdyuk, my classmate, had a gramophone and Syutka Finkelshtein my best friend and I came to her to dance on the verandah. Once an acquaintance of mine Vassia Rudenko brought a young man wearing glasses. He was a student of Leningrad conservatory David Matzyevskiy, Jew. He played the violin. He courted me. His mother turned out to be a christened Jew. He left for Leningrad and we began to write letters. I learned a lot about Leningrad, because he sent me many cards with views of the city. He came from Kharkov where he finished music and drama institute. He took part in an international contest of violinists. Next summer David came to Nemirov again. He fell in love with me, but I wasn't in love with him. I enjoyed his company, but my mother wasn't very happy with this development of events. The following summer she took me to her brother Naum in Uglich to keep me far from David. My mother believed that it was necessary to get education before thinking about marriage. I continued writing letters to David. He graduated from the Conservatory and returned to Kharkov where he became the first violin at the opera theater and assistant in the Conservatory. He was earning lots of money. He was waiting for me to graduate from the Institute and marry him. I got a job assignment to the district center of Andrushevka, but I knew that I was going to Kiev. I liked Matzyevskiy, but I didn't love him.

My parents moved to Kiev in 1936 to stay closer to where I was. They rented an apartment in Zhylianska Street and bought a dentist office. They worked at home. Our house in Nemirov was leased. I lived with my parents and we began to celebrate Pesach again. My mother brought matsah and we made a general cleanup of the apartment. We took out our Pesach dishes and cooked borsch vegetable meal, gefilte fish and sweet and sour stew. I didn't go to synagogue at that period.

Once my mother had a patient. That woman broke her artificial teeth and my mother treated her. In half a year after her visit her son returned from the Finnish war and came to my mother to have his teeth fixed. I was sitting on the sofa reading for my final exam. He came nearer to me asking "May I see what you are reading?» I raised my head and saw that he was blushing like he never blushed in the following 44 years. On a 3rd day he proposed to me. He was my husband to be Boris Zilberman. He was 5 years older than me. He graduated from Aviation College and was a student of Bataysk pilot school. He understood that piloting was a risky profession and entered Kiev Polytechnic Institute. During the Finnish war in 1939 he was a pilot. His plane fell on a forest. One pilot was killed and another pilot and Boris survived. They were both wounded. Boris climbed down a pine tree and fainted. He had his forearms fractured and he was shell-shocked. He stayed in hospital for a long time and almost lost speaking abilities. His mother was very worried about him and that was at that time when her artificial teeth broke.

My husband to be, Boris Zilberman was born to a wealthy Jewish family in Kiev in 1913. His father Isaac Zilberman had a very high position. He finished a Commercial College in Warsaw. He got married but he didn't love his wife Esther. They had 3 children. Before the revolution Isaac bought a 6-room apartment in Kiev. He was Chief of Northern Forestry Planning Department, chief of

Northern Caucasus forestry and went on business trips almost all the time. When Boris got married Isaac settled down in Kiev and became deputy manager of Department at the Ministry of Soviet Farms.

Boris and I were wed in the registry office near the Opera Theater on 9 July 1940. His friend Grisha was with us. Then we went down to Kreschatik and celebrated our wedding at the restaurant of the Grand Hotel. We had Champaign, black caviar and delicacies. I came home and felt dizzy from Champaign. I told my mother that we celebrated the receipt of diplomas. We didn't tell my parents that we got married. We believed it was more romantic in this way and it was to be a surprise for them. On that evening they went to visit their friend, eye doctor Binshtock and Boris came to see me.

At 11 in the evening I told my husband to leave because my parents were to come back home soon, but he said that now that he was my husband he was going to stay. My parents came home and I told them that Boris and I registered our wedding. My mother almost fainted such a huge surprise it was for her, but then we celebrated this event at home again. My parents were happy for us - they liked Boris a lot.

On 19 July 1940 we had a small wedding party at home big wedding parties were not customary before the war; we didn't have a huppah either. There were 3 friends of my husband and my friends at our party. We didn't have a place to live. Boris' parents, his younger sister Bella born in 1921 was studying at Kiev Medical Institute and Boris lived in the apartment in Shevchenko Blvd. Boris' older sister Manya was married, had a daughter – Talka, and they lived in Mikhailovskaya Street. My husband was director of Mechanic Plant. I had to take my job assignment in Andrushevka. Boris and his boss went to the Central Committee to solicit for my employment in Kiev, but they failed. I had to go to Andrushevka and we kept visiting each other on that year.

I had collected works of Boris Lavrenev - I was fond of reading his books. When my husband started a conversation about Lavrenev and his biography I opened my mouth. He knew such details that I admired his intelligence. I fell in love passionately and married him in two weeks. Few days before Boris and I got married Matzyeskiy came to Kiev to marry me. I ran away from him and he beseeched me and stayed in Kiev 5 days before he left without saying "good bye". When I was married I received a letter from him where he wrote that he was desperate and that he was madly and hopelessly in love with me. I didn't respond. Later I found out that he volunteered to the front when the war began and perished in the vicinity of Kiev. I believe that his mother cursed me. She might have thought it was my fault that I made her son so unhappy. She proably believed that if I had married her son, his life would have been different.

On 22 June 1941 I arrived in Odessa to spend my vacation there, Boris couldn't go with me. He was busy at his work in Kiev. I got off the train and heard Molotov's speech on the radio. I stayed in Odessa for two days before I got on the train back to Kiev. My return trip lasted 11 days on the open platform. This was a military train and the platform was coupled to it. During air raids the train stopped and we hid in the bushes or woods. There was a woman with two young children. During raids she gave me one child and grabbed another and we jumped into the bushes.

On the third day of the war my cousin Pepo and my father's sister Manya and her two daughters Anka, born in 1913, a pharmaceutist, and Ruzia, a nurse, arrived in Kiev. Ruzia's husband was

killed on the first days of the war. My parents gave them whatever they had and they moved on. Anka had a beautiful child. At the beginning of the war he and Pepo's son fell ill with dysentery. Pepo's son survived and Anka's son died. My grandmother Ginda and her sons Michel and Yankel stayed in Lutsk and perished in 1941.

My husband's plant became a mine plant. He was responsible for evacuation of the plant and he helped our parents and many other families to evacuate on the trains for transportation of equipment. He stayed at the plant day and night but on the day when I got to Kiev he went home to make sure that it was all right. I went to the 3rd floor and knocked on the door when I heard his steps on the stairs.
The government left for Kharkov. My father-in-law went there, too. My husband sent me to Kharkov and left for Middle Asia and then to the Ural. I evacuated with my husband's relatives, but I got lost on the way. I was going to the East on a train. We reached Saratov where my father's youngest brother lived. When the train stopped I decided to go visit him. When I came there I saw my father sitting at the table reading a newspaper. What a meeting! We decided that I would go to my destination anyway and they would join me later. I reached Tashkent region and stopped at the Nizhniy Chirchik area (about 4000 km from Kiev).

There was a hospital there and I worked as chairman of military commission. My husband got a 10-day leave and visited me. When he left I realized that I was pregnant. I lived in a 3-room house. I lived in a big room with a stove, a physician-pediatrician with her daughter from Kishinev lived in another room and a Russian nurse Tonia was a tenant of the 3rd room. In the end of September my parents and my mother's sister Clara came from Saratov. They found a place to live. My father worked as a dentist in district clinic. My mother stayed with me some time before my baby was due. When it was time for me to go to hospital chairman of the collective farm Vassilenko gave us a horse-driven cart. My mother and I went to the hospital. It was snowing and was very cold. They started fire in the stoves in hospital, but it turned out that flues were not cleaned and all smoke was gathering in wards. They opened the doors to let some fresh air in the wards. My mother looked around and said "Come what may, but we are going home. They will both catch cold if she stays". My son was born at home on 13 November. My friend, midwife Valia, assisted me during childbirth. My husband was in the Ural at that time and heard the news about his son in December.

There was a shop in Nizhniy Chirchik where employees made ropes from toe. One of the employees was a young Jewish woman from Poland. She had no warm clothes whatsoever and was in a desperate situation. I decided to invite her live with me as an aid. Rosa used to say that my son saved two lives: mine, because I wasn't recruited to the army due to my pregnancy and hers, because she would have died of cold. Rosa was very happy and adored my son Leonid.

At the beginning of winter in 1944 many other doctors and I were summoned to Tashkent for reevacuation. My parents went with me. At that time Germans reoccupied Donbass and we had to stay in Tashkent for longer. I went to work at a polyclinic. My parents lived in a house in the old town and Leonid and I were staying in a shabby dwelling with no ceiling, only a roof. There were two sisters, Jews sharing this dwelling with me. They were very decent and intelligent. Once I got terrible toothache and went to my parents. My father looked very ill. My mother looked at my tooth and I told her that I was going back home to feed Leonid and take a syringe with morphine, and would be back. When I returned I saw my mother sitting on the porch. She said "Your father died".

It happened on 13 May 1944.
In some time we went back to Kiev. The 3 of us: my mother, my son Leonid and I. One carriage of the train was full of doctors and the rest of the train was for Kiev Franko Theater. Our return trip lasted over two weeks. We arrived in June 1945. Our house in Zhylanska Street was destroyed. My father-in-law and his family were back. The younger sister of my husband had a fiancé, military engineer. He received an apartment and she lived with him, so my family could stay with my in-laws for some time. Later we my mother, my son and I went to Nemirov. Only one bomb was dropped on Nemirov during the war. It destroyed part of our house and a printing house nearby. During the war the German commandant of the town gave our house to his lover a Ukrainian woman, and her husband. The commandant took the lover with him and her mother resided in our house. When we returned she moved to her friend.

There was a lot of chicken meat sold in Nemirov at reasonable prices. We were so starved that we were happy to have some food. The problem was to slaughter them. We just couldn't. But we needed food, so I slaughtered them in the weeds in our garden, but I left them there and my mother went to pick them up. I couldn't chop huge logs for wood for the stove and pushed them into the stove full size. But those were comparatively small discomforts considering all our previous problems. The locals also brought us some food. Soon I went to work as a doctor at the clinic.
In spring 1945 my husband returned, during the war we wrote letters to one another. He came to Nemirov to take all of us to Kiev. He managed to get an apartment for my mother in 44 Saksaganskogo Street and we lived with my mother at first. There was one big room where we installed partials to make two rooms, a kitchen with no windows and a toilet. There was no bathroom. My husband was director of metalwork plant. He was a born manager and his workers respected him a lot. Many buildings in Kiev were destroyed. My husband obtained permission to build a house for his employees in Gorky Street. In 1947 we received a two-room apartment in this house. My mother invited Clara from Tula to live with her. We sold our house in Nemirov.

We were very enthusiastic about establishment of Israel in 1948. We felt proud for our people and for our relatives Pepo, Manya, Anka and Ruzia that participated in this process.
In 1949 I got a job at the Bacteriological Institute where I detected antibiotic properties of some bacteria. I joined the antibiotics department that was opened in our Institute. I told Tamara, head of this Department, Candidate of biological sciences about my survey and she allowed me to continue my tests at my free time. I took a course of English because I realized that it was necessary to know a foreign language to be able to read scientific articles and journals. Upon successful completion of the course I could read medical books and journals at the foreign literature in the CPSY Library.
To start writing thesis on my subject I had to obtain approval of deputy director Professor Diachenko. I went to see him with all my developments. He was an old man and didn't care a bit about things. He told me that nobody needed my experimentation. After this meeting I cried all night through. Shortly afterwards our department was closed and I got an offer to take a training course in tuberculosis which I did.

In 1952 people were saying that the authorities were planning to deport Jews to Birobidjan. I convinced my husband to enter into a contract for a job in the North to avoid deportation. My husband obtained an assignment for a big oil deposit in Oktiabrskoye, Bashkiria. He was appointed as operations manager in Tuimazyn oil trust. It was a new town and we received an apartment in a

new house. I got a job as a nurse doctor at their medical department. Manager of this department Malinovskiy always valued my opinion. I remember the “doctors’ case” very well. One of my patients said that all these Jews should be all hanged and I felt like fainting. I can never forget the horror I felt hearing this bandit. The reality was troublesome; newspapers kept publishing articles about murderers of doctors and people lived in constant expectation of arrest. Fortunately, nothing happened to us.

I worked at the hospital from 9:00 till 15:00. I came from work when Leonid came from school, he was 10. He had dinner and went out to play. He usually played at the construction site nearby where he knew quite a few workers. I remember March 1953. Leonid went out and I turned on the radio. It announced that Stalin died. When Leonid came back home I was crying. He said “Mother, don’t cry. The workers are so happy”. I didn’t believe Stalin, but I felt cautious about what the future was to bring us.

We started packing and returned to Kiev in May 1953. I went to work at the tuberculosis clinic and in half a year I became its director, although I was not member of the Communist Party. In 1957 after aunt Clara died we changed my mother’s and our apartment into one bigger apartment and my mother began to live with us. My mother was retired and helped me about the house. We began to observe Jewish traditions. My mother lit candles on Shabbat, we always had matsah at home and cooked traditional Jewish food at Pesach. I played the piano in the evening and sometimes my mother, my friend Syutka Finkelshtein and I went to concerts at the Philharmonic and Conservatory.

Leonid finished school in 1959. In 1957 there was an order issued that young people could enter higher educational Institutions having work experience. I decided to send Leonid to work and complete his secondary education at an evening school. Leonid decided to go to Kiev Polytechnic Institute. Before entrance exams my husband’s friend that was working at this Institute told us that his wife was in the admission commission and that she saw that there was a tick against our son’s name. This tick meant that he was not to be admitted. My husband didn’t believe his friend thinking that he was fishing for some money. Our son was a success with his studies and had private teachers. Besides he had work experience and we saw no reasons why he should fail at his exams. Leonid received highest grades at tow exams and the next exam was physics. His examiners put him the lowest grade. Leonid was so unhappy that he began asking questions and the examiners threatened that they would call the police if he continued behaving like a hooligan. Leonid didn’t come home and I searched for him everywhere. I found him on the slopes of the Dnepr. He tore up his written preparation to answer at the exam and it was not possible to prove that he didn’t deserve the lowest grade. He was rejected because of his Jewish nationality. Anti-Semitism in Ukraine was very strong and Jews couldn’t enter any higher educational institutions.

In two months’ time I read at the Vecherniy Kiev newspaper that Melioration Institute in Rovno announced additional admission to its affiliate in Kiev. Leonid entered this Institute. It was closed, though, in a year’s time and the students were transferred to the sanitary engineering faculty of Kiev Construction Institute. Leonid graduated from it in 1964.

In 1960 a new tuberculosis hospital was built in Vassilkovskaya Street and I was appointed its director. In 1962 I was included in the list of a delegation of doctors to Poland. Some time later the delegation went to Poland and I was left behind. My acquaintance that was working at the health

department told me that I was crossed out of the lists due to my typical Jewish last name. I got concerned that our last name might also have its impact in Leonid's life. It was allowed to take another name at that time and Leonid submitted his documents to the registry office to have his name changed and a new passport issued. He decided to take the last name of Zimin. Leonid defended his thesis of candidate of sciences. He is a scientific specialist and has his works published in journals. He has worked at the Institute of thermal physics for over 30 years. He has been head of department there for 15 years. However, Leonid has always identified himself as a Jew.

In 1964 I heard on the radio that State awards were awarded to a group of scientists from Bacteriological Institute where I had worked 15 years before. They were given this award for the subject that I was developing at m time. I got so upset. They didn't allow me to work on this subject only because I was a Jew.

In 1966 my mother died of infarction.

My son married Galia Struchenko, a Ukrainian girl, in 1965. Their son Alexei was born in 1967. My husband and I bought them an apartment in Druzhby Narodov Blvd. Galina's mother happened to be a friend of my cousin Lisa. Galina and her mother Ksenia always treated Jews with respect. They have many Jewish friends. We've always had friends of various nationalities. Leonid also has many Russian friends. Galina and Leonid are very happy together. Leonid and Galina are not religious, but they always have matsah at Pesach and Easter bread at Christian Easter. Galia cooks Gefilte fish and they visit us at Pesach.

Alexei finished school with gold medal in 1984. One day specialists from Moscow Physic technical Institute came to Ukraine to interview Ukrainian children to admit them to the Institute based on results. Alexei was 16 and he went to the interview. He called me later to tell me that he believed he was a success, because members of this commission were pleased with his answers. They asked him about the nationality of his parents and he said that his mother was Ukrainian and his father was a Jew. Alexei became a programmer. He worked in the US for two years. He lives in Moscow now with his family. Alexei has a Russian wife Lena and they have 3 children: Ksenia, 8-year old, Tatiana, 5-year old and Vania that will soon turn 2. Alexei identifies himself as a Jew. His family is not religious, but they observe some traditions and celebrate both Pesach and Easter.

In 1984 my husband died of cancer in his stomach. We lived a happy life of love and understanding. We had friends of various nationalities. We got together on holidays and birthdays and went to theaters and cinema together. In summer we went to the seashore. Regretfully, I've never been abroad. Few years before he died Boris was convincing me to move to Israel. I refused, because I knew that Leonid and Galia were staying. Besides, I can't bear the heat. My husband hated the Soviet regime and was very insisting about leaving the country. When I asked him about Leonid he used to reply that he would join us there if he wanted to.

In 1978 I retired from the tuberculosis hospital where I had been director for 18 years. My pension is 162 Hrivna (Editor's note: it's about $30, her apartment's fee is about $20 per month. It is impossible to make ends meet with this money). My former patients still call me every now and then. I receive calls from my acquaintances residing in Israel and the US. One of my friends lives in Great Britain. I often call Syutka Finkelshtein. Sometimes my son Lyonia and his wife Zhenia visit me. My friends call me on the phone. They are old and cannot come on a visit.

I receive food packages from Khesed. Recently I had a woman aid from Khesed, but then the reviewed their policy and do not provide aid to the people that have children residing in Kiev. I have a tenant and pay the rent money that she pays me to my housemaid Sonia. She comes 3 times a week to clean the apartment and cook for me. I can hardly walk now and have very poor sight. Sonia is a Jew and she sometimes cooks sweet and sour stew and latkes for me. At Pesach she cooks borsch and buys matsah for me. Sometimes on Friday my son visits me. I play the piano for him, then I lit candles and we celebrate Shabbat. That is how I live.