

# Dora Postrelko

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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*Dora Postrelko lives alone in a small room (12 square meters, at the most) in a communal apartment [1](#) on the first floor of a house in one of Kiev's distant districts. Her neighbors are a young Ukrainian family of three. They get along well, but that doesn't mean that they don't argue every now and then, due to lack of space. They have separate power and gas meters and their own light bulbs in support facilities. There is a long hallway, toilet and bathroom and a 5 square meter kitchen with two tiny tables and a stove. They keep their kitchen utilities in the rooms. The apartment needs to be renovated because it's in a terrible condition. Dora's room is poorly furnished, but it's clean and decorated with her embroidery and crocheted napkins that she made herself. Dora never finished secondary school, but she loves reading. She has books: fiction and detective stories. Her furniture is old and worn out. Dora had an injury and surgery a few years ago. She can hardly walk with crutches. She cannot sit so I help her lie down on the sofa. Dora has a strong will and a sense of humor, but she doesn't let outsiders look at the bottom of her heart. Therefore, she asked me to ask no questions about her personal life. She only told me what she wanted to tell.*

My maternal and paternal ancestors came from Tomashpol, Vinnitsa province, in Ukraine [about 400 km from Kiev]. This town was within the Pale of Settlement [2](#) before the Revolution of 1917 [3](#). 90% of its population was Jewish. Ukrainian families lived on the outskirts of town where land wasn't so expensive. There were small pise-walled houses with downward roofs, window shutters and front doors. There were narrow lime and poplar trees alongside the streets. The Jews in the town were craftsmen: tailors, shoemakers, joiners, glass-cutters and barbers. They had their shops on the ground floors of their houses. There were also wealthier families of a doctor, a pharmacist and merchants, who lived in stone houses in the main square. There was a synagogue and a market. Ukrainian farmers sold poultry, millet, and vegetables and bought salt, soap, matches, haberdashery and hardware from the Jews.

My maternal ancestors, the Wainshteins, were merchants and wealthy. I don't know their names or what they were selling. They had many children. The youngest, Ehill Wainshtein, my grandfather, was his mother's darling. Ehill was a sickly child and this only added to his mother's love and devotion. Ehill was deaf and dumb and children teased him and didn't want to play with him. When it was time to find a fiancée for him it turned out that nobody wanted to marry him; despite his wealth. He met Anne, a girl from a poor family that counted each piece of bread, and there were always more hungry mouths to feed than pieces of bread. Although his parents were against their marriage he married the girl and went to live in her family. They had a wedding at the synagogue and a chuppah, but the wedding party was rather small since my grandfather's parents were against this marriage and abandoned their once beloved son.

Ehill and Anne lived with Anne's family several months until they managed to buy a half-destroyed hut with the help of his parents because they didn't accept her and were very unhappy that their son lived in her family's house. That was the last time they supported them. They told him to learn a profession since they weren't going to support his family. Ehill was an apprentice to a local roofer for several months. He made mugs, buckets and basins from roof tin in the roofer's shop and studied making roofs and painting them. He became a skilled roofer. Grandmother Anne was a housewife. She was busy raising her children. Grandfather Ehill died in 1920, and Grandmother Anne died 10 years later, in 1930.

They had five children: Dvoira, Leib, Moshe, my mother Surah and Abram. The boys studied at cheder, where they received the basics of Jewish religious education, and at the Jewish elementary school. The girls also finished two or three years of the Jewish elementary school.

Dvoira, the oldest one, was born in 1884. When she was a very young girl a man, 20 years older than her, proposed to her. Dvoira refused to marry him and married a young man her age instead. I don't remember his name. He died long before I was born. When Dvoira lost her husband her first fiancé proposed to her again and, again, she refused him. This happened several times: in the middle of the 1920s and before the Great Patriotic War [4](#). Then, in 1944, when Dvoira returned to Tomashpol from evacuation, he proposed to her again. They finally got married: Dvoira was 60 and her husband was 80 years old at the time. They lived together for 15 years. Dvoira died in 1960 and her husband lived until the age of 105.

Dvoira was very religious. She celebrated Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. Dvoira's children were my friends. We kept in touch over many years. We visited each other when we grew up. We liked to get together and recall our childhood and our parents. Her children always congratulated me on my birthday and I congratulated them. They weren't religious. Her older boy died in infancy. Her daughters' names were Olte, Tsylia, Fania and Rachil. Her sons' names were Fridl, Naum and Moshe. I don't remember their exact dates of birth. They were born in Dvoira's first marriage between 1903 and 1915. Her daughters Olte and Rachil moved to Kiev in the early 1930s, after they got married, and Dvoira and Fridl followed them. During the Great Patriotic War they were in evacuation, and they returned to Kiev after the war. They were married and had children. They didn't have any education and were laborers at plants. They passed away a long time ago and were buried in the town cemetery. Naum was recruited to the army and perished during the Great Patriotic War.

My mother's older brothers Leib and Moshe left for South America around 1910 hoping for a better future. My mother loved her brothers dearly, especially Moshe. She had a picture of the two of them shortly before he left for South America. Her brothers settled down in Argentina. They corresponded with their grandparents for several years. Some time later Moshe died of some disease. He was still young when he died. Dvoira's son, my cousin, was named after him. I have no information about Leib because his letters didn't reach us after the Revolution of 1917 and we stopped writing to him because it wasn't safe [to keep in touch with relatives abroad] [5](#).

My mother's younger brother Abram, born in 1901, got a higher education during the time of the Soviet regime. He entered agricultural college in Kiev and was then transferred to the Industrial College [Polytechnic College at present]. Abram lived in Kiev and worked as an engineer at a plant after finishing college. During the Great Patriotic War he was in evacuation in Siberia where his

plant relocated and returned to Kiev after the war. Abram married Maria, a Ukrainian girl, at the age of 49. She had two children of her own already. Their daughter Sophia was born in 1950, and given her name after the first letter of my mother's name. Abram died in 1975. Since then I've never saw Sophia and her mother again.

My mother, Surah Wainshtein, was born in 1893. She finished a Jewish elementary school and began to help her sister Dvoira, who had several children by then, about the house. My mother grew up in a religious family. My aunt told me that their parents celebrated all Jewish holidays, observed Sabbath and followed the kashrut and Jewish traditions. Life took a routinely pace until my mother met my father- to-be.

My father Aron Gehtmann also came from Tomashpol. My paternal grandfather Srul Gehtmann was born in Tomashpol in the 1860s. He was a joiner, but he didn't have much work to do. He was a very religious Jew and stayed in the synagogue all day long. He engaged himself in reading old dusty religious books in Hebrew and in prayers. Srul was a well- respected man who could interpret the Talmud and the Torah; I don't know whether he ever had a chance to use this knowledge in everyday life, but it certainly added to his personality. However, he was no good in everyday routine. His wife Surah and their children lived from hand-to- mouth in their small house, which didn't differ from other houses of poor Jewish families in Tomashpol. There were two small rooms, a small kitchen with a Russian stove [6](#), which occupied a lot of space, and my grandfather's shop.

Meat was rare food for the family. They ate potatoes for the most part and could hardly afford to have a festive meal on Saturdays. But still, before Pesach and other religious holidays, Grandmother Surah bought a chicken at the market, which was kept in a box in the kitchen until it was time to bring it to the shochet. My grandfather demanded that all religious rules were strictly observed in the family. He conducted the seder and my father, being the only boy in the family, asked him questions from the Haggaddah. During the Great Patriotic War my grandparents stayed in Tomashpol. I don't know if they stayed in town throughout the war or got into a camp or ghetto. All I know is that my grandmother starved to death during the occupation. Grandfather Srul survived the war and died in 1946.

My grandparents had four daughters and a son: Dvoira, Esther, Gitl, Beila and my father Aron. They were raised religiously and my grandfather made sure that they strictly observed all rules. The girls were taught housekeeping and helped my grandmother about the house. They were all religious and strictly observed traditions. Dvoira, the oldest, born in 1885, and her husband Gershl lived in Tomashpol before the Great Patriotic War. Gershl died before the war and Dvoira and her children disappeared in evacuation. Most likely, they perished in an air raid.

Esther, born around 1890, was in evacuation during the Great Patriotic War and lived in Tomashpol after the war. I visited her several times. Esther died in the 1960s and her children Sonia and Moshe moved to the USA in the 1970s. There were two other sisters, Gitl and Beila, but I didn't know them. All I know is that they were married and had children. They were in evacuation with their children during the Great Patriotic War and returned to Tomashpol after the war. That's all I know about them. I think they passed away a long time ago and their children moved to other locations.

The main reason why my grandfather's family was poor was that they had four daughters. They had to get married and, according to Jewish laws, a bride needed dowry; the Jewish [Yiddish] word

is 'nadr'. After a girl was born to a family her parents began to save money for her dowry. My grandparents needed a lot of money for the dowry for four daughters. Grandmother Surah managed to save some 'peanuts', by putting aside some money from the modest family income.

My father didn't like Jewish customs and traditions from his childhood on. He believed they were the reason for the suffering of his mother and his sisters and their poverty. He went to cheder like all Jewish boys, but then he refused to continue his studies and gave up religion for good. He thought it was funny the way his father was praying and swinging, repeating weird words. He was slapped and hit for mocking his father. As a protest, he spent more and more time with his Ukrainian friends. He ate bread with his friends during Pesach. This made my grandfather very angry and didn't help liking his son, of course. However, my father agreed to have his bar mitzvah. A year later he ran away from home and went to Vinnitsa where he became an apprentice to a joiner.

My father returned to Tomashpol before he turned 18. He met my mother. He had known her since he was a child, but hadn't seen her for a few years. My mother was two years older than my father. She was a beauty and sang wonderfully. My father fell in love. My mother also fell in love with him, although he was just a boy then. According to Jewish custom they couldn't get married. If a girl had the same name as the boy's mother they weren't allowed to be married. [Editor's note: This custom was followed only among certain ultra-Orthodox groups.] Superstition had it that this might lead to the mother's death. My mother's name was Surah and so was the name of my paternal grandmother. My mother was kind of destined to bad luck. Her sister told me that her first fiancé's mother was also called Surah. The boy was madly in love with my mother and thought of ways of making her his wife but had to give up. He left Tomashpol and my mother never saw him again.

My father was different. When my grandmother Surah consulted a rabbi and had his support to forbid my father to marry the girl he loved, he took my mother away without telling anyone. Only my mother's sister Dvoira was aware of their plan. They went to a Ukrainian village near Tomashpol and settled down in a Ukrainian house. They had a kitchen garden and kept livestock. This happened in 1914. My mother soon got pregnant. When my father's parents heard about it they asked my father and mother to come home and live with them. When the baby was due my parents went back to Tomashpol.

My sister Hana was born in May 1915. On the day she was born my father received a call-up from the military registry office. He had to join the tsarist army. World War I was raging and my father went to the front. My mother stayed in his parents' house. Grandfather Srul had a harsh character and treated my mother badly, but Grandmother Surah liked her namesake and tried to help her, although she had been against her son's marriage at the beginning.

My father was at the front until the middle of 1916. At that time soldiers with revolutionary ideas began to agitate against the tsar and my father took advantage of the situation and left for home. Simply said, he was a deserter. He went to Russia where he knocked around for about a year before he returned to Tomashpol after the October Revolution of 1917.

When he returned my parents had a civil wedding ceremony at a registry office. They didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding. My father's parents didn't like it at all, and my father rented an apartment in a private house. I was born in November 1918.

My parents were poor. My father was a joiner and my mother was a housewife. My father didn't have much work to do. It was the period of the Civil War [7](#), and nobody needed his skills. My father was very enthusiastic about the Revolution. He liked the fact that poor people like him came to power. He supported the Soviet power and agitated for the Soviets. He helped to expropriate wealthy people's houses and belongings. At that time, when regimes in the town switched at least once a month from the Reds [8](#) to the Whites [9](#) and the Greens [10](#), there were pogroms [11](#) during which Jews were robbed and killed. Our family didn't suffer from them since my father had many Ukrainian friends that were hiding us.

My father survived thanks to his friends. When another gang [12](#) came to town they began to execute supporters of the Soviet regime. My father was buried up to his chest for not being a Jew but cooperating with the authorities instead. They would have buried him alive, but one of those bandits knew my father and was his friend. They used to drink vodka together. This man persuaded their chief to let my father go. Therefore, my father's wild, reckless character rescued him. The bandits didn't touch my grandparents, who were hiding in the basement. They attacked younger people that supported the Soviet power. Grandfather Ehil died in 1920, but since I was only two years old then I can't remember that time. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery according to Jewish laws.

My father was different from other Jews. He liked parties and drinking, and he loved women. In 1920 my mother had another boy, Ehil, named after my grandfather, who had died shortly before. She was constantly busy with the children and about the house. She wasn't attractive any longer and my father lost interest in her. He began to see a Russian woman called Evdokia, who had come from Petersburg to become a teacher in the Russian school. There were no arguments in our house. My father just left my mother with the three children. He took Evdokia to the same village where he had taken my mother once upon a time.

My mother fell ill after my father left. She loved him dearly and couldn't bear his betrayal. She refused to eat or breastfeed the baby. The baby was given cow milk with some water. It was a period of famine [in Ukraine] [13](#) and it was hard to get milk. The baby contracted enteric fever and died. I have dim memories of a small coffin with a little body inside and my grandfather Srul praying and crying. My grandfather visited us every now and then after our father left us. He felt sorry for my mother, my sister and me, but what could he do to help us? My mother was indifferent to what was happening around her. She died shortly after the baby's death. They said she died from a broken heart. I don't know a scientific name for her disease; she faded from anguish and sorrow.

My father didn't come to her funeral. When he heard that she had died he ordered my grandmother Surah to take care of us. We lived with my grandparents for some time. We starved. I even remember my grandfather saying that we were a burden to them. My cousin Olte and Dvoira often came to see us. They brought us some food, but it wasn't enough. We were getting swollen from hunger. Uncle Abram, my mother's younger brother, came from Kiev and made arrangements for us to get into a children's home.

It was a Jewish children's home in Tomashpol. At least we got regular meals there. In those years the Joint [14](#) provided assistance and support to Russian children's institutions. We sometimes ate American tinned meat and egg powder - it was a feast. We wore trousers, sweaters and dresses

from America. It was a small children's home: a one-storied building with about 40 children and a few teachers. We didn't learn anything. We played a lot and spoke Yiddish. I don't remember any celebration of religious holidays there; I don't remember any holidays from my childhood. It seems to me now that there were none.

I felt lonely in the children's home since my sister Hana, who was three years older than I, was in another class and spent little time with me. We had been staying in that home for about a year, when Evdokia, my father's new wife, came to see us. She brought sweets and tried to persuade us to come live with her, our father and their little son, born in 1922. This happened in summer when Uncle Abram was on vacation in Tomashpol. When he heard about her arrival he quickly came to the children's home and told us that we weren't going to father's new family, where we would just be baby-sitters for their children. Abram told Evdokia to go away. She left and I never saw her again. I didn't know my father until 1945.

We moved from one children's home to the next. For some reason children's homes were closed down, just to be opened in another location. When I was six years old our home moved into a big stone house that formerly belonged to some rich man. It was being renovated, and once I fell from the balcony on the second floor, which had no fence. I injured my hip and this injury developed into osseous tuberculosis. My sister and I were separated. She was sent to Bratslav and I went to Gaisin. [Editor's note: Bratslav and Gaisin are small towns near Tomashpol in Vinnitsa region.] Then I moved to another children's home in Krasnoye and then in Peschanka - I have dim memories about it. They were all the same with big bedrooms, small beds with thin blankets and little food. Our teachers were kind to us and when I was small I called each of them 'mother'. I went to a local Jewish school when I was in one of those children's homes, and my sister studied in a Jewish school in Bratslav. When we were to move to another children's home my friends asked our teacher to send me to the children's home in Bratslav. That's how we reunited.

The children's home in Bratslav was probably the worst one. The director of the home cared little about raising children. Boys were roaming about, destroyed everything they bumped into and beat the girls. They only beat me once, but Hana, who had turned into a radiant, young girl suffered from their passes. None of our relatives ever visited us all these years. Only occasionally they wrote letters telling us about their hard life. In 1929 Hana wrote to Abram asking him to take us away from the children's home. He told us to wait until the summer vacations, but we couldn't wait any longer. In early spring, as soon as the snow had melted, Hana took me by the hand and we left the home. We headed to nearby Tulchin, where Dvoira's son Fridl worked as a blacksmith. We met a balegole [Yiddish for coachman] on the way. He asked where we were going. He happened to be riding to Tulchin and told us to get on the cart. My sister said that we didn't have money, but he just laughed and said, 'Get on, kids!' He took us to Fridl's house. Fridl sent a telegram to Uncle Abram in Kiev, saying, 'The children ran away from the children's home'. Abram was a student at Kiev Industrial College. He came and took us with him to Kiev.

He lived in a hostel. There were a few other tenants in his room. They put a bed for us behind a curtain and we stayed in this room several weeks until Abram made arrangements for us to go to the children's home in Kiev.

We went to another children's home in Kuznechnaya Street [today Gorkogo Street, named after Gorky [15](#), one of the central streets in Kiev]. This children's home was no different from others, but



we liked living in the center of the city with its wide streets. Along with other children of the home I went to a Jewish lower secondary school. The teachers and other children at school treated us well. The school for senior pupils, where Hana studied, was in Tereschenskaya Street [Pushkinskaya at present], not far from ours, and Hana and I often saw each other. We did our homework after school and played together. Sometimes our schoolmates invited us to their homes. Their parents were good to us and gave us clothes and treats. Uncle Abram visited us several times.

In 1932, during the period of famine in Ukraine, the children's home was to move to Zvenigorodka near Kiev. I don't know why we had to move so often. By that time Hana had finished school, and I didn't want to go there alone. I asked my uncle to take me from the children's home. My uncle said that he would under the condition that I went to work since he couldn't provide for us in those hard times. So, I just finished five years at school and never continued my studies.

My sister went to study at the Rabfak [16](#) and lived with Uncle Abram. She studied very well and was transferred to the second year. Uncle Abram helped me to enter a vocational school at Kiev Locomotive Repair Plant. I worked at the plant and studied. Life was very hard. This was a period of famine. My uncle helped me to get a job in a shop, where I had to carry heavy planks to get 800 grams of bread per coupons. I got very tired at work.

The three of us lived in one room that Uncle Abram had received from the plant. Once, late in the evening, I fell asleep and didn't hear Uncle Abram knocking on the door. He got very angry and told me off. I felt hurt. I packed my belongings and left the room. I was 14 years old. My sister was more reserved and stayed with Uncle Abram. She told me to forgive our uncle, but I was stubborn. I slept in parks or at the railway station. I was taken away by the militia several times. They threatened to send me to a children's home for vagrancy. Every time my sister came to my rescue. She had received a small room at the hostel of the Rabfak where she took me. The administration of the hostel didn't allow me to stay there overnight and I had to get to the room through the window. It was a good thing that the room was on the first floor.

Later I received a small room in an apartment from my school. This was in 1933. I didn't have any energy to lift a heavy hammer or even to walk to work. One morning I couldn't get up. I stayed in bed for three days. My legs got swollen. A few days later my schoolmate came to tell me that I had to go to the trade union committee of my school. It turned out they had been putting money from our salary into a bank and had received some interest. I got a pair of shoes, a big fish and some money. I went to the market and bought some bread, potatoes and some other food. I went to see my sister, who was also staying in bed from hunger and couldn't go to work. She boiled the fish. This fish and assistance of the plant saved us.

A few days later students of my sister's school went to work in a kolkhoz [17](#). This kolkhoz was doing fine and people didn't starve. We lived there for ten days and our condition improved. When we returned to Kiev I saw an announcement about the admission of typesetters into a vocational school at a plant and decided to go there. I had to make a plot to enter this school since they required a certificate of lower secondary education that I didn't have. Hana had two certificates: one in Russian that she submitted to her school and another one in English. I changed one letter in the initials and submitted the certificate to the admission commission. I was admitted to the school. After one year of studies I became a manual typesetter and got a job assignment to the printing house of the journal called Communist. I and two other girls, employees of the printing

house, lived in a room near the railway station. The printing house paid our rent.

I worked in Solomenka district and got to work by tram. There was a law at that time. According to that law an employee got fired for being late for work. They also made a note in one's employment record book that a person was fired for missing from work, and nobody ever wanted to hire such a person. This was what happened to me. The trams were overcrowded, and once I jumped on but lost balance and fell under the tram. I was injured and couldn't go to work. I should have called a doctor to take a sick leave, but I just stayed at home for two days instead. When I came to work I found out that I had been fired with a disgraceful note in my employment record book. I couldn't get another job and stayed with my sister for some time. She was already a student at the industrial college. She received a stipend that was too low for the two of us. Aunt Dvoira and her daughters Rachil and Olte lived in Kiev at that time. They convinced me to go to Tomashpol where my relatives could help me to get a job. I went there in 1935.

In Tomashpol I stayed with my cousin Moshe, Aunt Dvoira's son. Moshe had married shortly before, and his wife Riva was having her first baby. I got a job at the town printing house. Its director, Abram Gohman, was a very nice and kind person. I worked in the typesetting shop and got a good salary. I went to the entertainment center with my friends. I didn't take part in any public activities and wasn't interested in politics. At school I was a Young Octobrist [18](#) and a pioneer like all other children, but I didn't feel like joining the Komsomol [19](#). I liked singing and dancing and went to young people's parties.

Moshe's family didn't follow the kashrut, but Moshe didn't work on Saturdays and sometimes went to the synagogue. He wasn't deeply religious, just like so many other young people at that time, but his family traditionally celebrated the main holidays: Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. I lived in Tomashpol for about a year. In spring 1936 I received a telegram from Kiev. My sister had tuberculosis and was in hospital. I went to Kiev immediately. I didn't have a place to stay. I spent a few nights at the railway station. Then I bumped into my former schoolmate Mariana. She was the youngest daughter of a big Ukrainian family and they gave me shelter. They were very sympathetic people, accepted me into their family and gave me food until I got a job.

It was hard for me to work at the typesetting shop. It was hazardous work and I was afraid to develop tuberculosis like my sister. I went to work at the Central Post Office in Kiev. I sorted mail in the beginning and then became a crew leader. I liked this job. My management valued me and I often got bonuses and awards of appreciation. My sister got treatment in hospital and in a recreation center in Kiev. Then she came back to study in college. Each year in summer she got a free trip to the tuberculosis recreation center in the Crimea. She got better and began to see her fellow student Sasha Goldberg, a Jew. They planned to get married after finishing college, but life had its own rules.

On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. We didn't know anything about the war in Europe and it came as a complete surprise to us. My sister defended her diploma a few days after the war began and got a mandatory job assignment [20](#) to Kryukov-on-the-Dnieper, a small town near Kremenchug [250 km from Kiev]. There was a railcar repair plant there. I quit my job because I decided to go with my sister. Her fiancé Sasha was sent to the military plant in Cheliabinsk, a distant town in Russia. Before he left he took us to his mother, who lived in Artyoma Street. She helped us to get on a boat sailing down the Dnieper to Kremenchug and from there we had to get



to the town where the plant was located.

The boat was overcrowded. People were evacuating to Dnepropetrovsk and from there farther East. It didn't even occur to us that we had to evacuate as well. Hana had her job assignment, received her traveling allowances and had to get to work. The Dnieper was bombed, but fortunately nobody suffered on our boat. We arrived in Kremenchug at night and bombs exploded all around. There was such a noise that we were afraid that our eardrums would burst into pieces. We hid in some pits to wait until the bombing was over. Then we crossed the Dnieper on a boat to get to Kryukov. Kryukov consisted of a plant, a big three-storied building for non-manual workers and a small village. My sister and I got a room for two in this building. Hana went to work for several weeks. On 6th August 1941 German troops landed a few kilometers away from the plant. Emergency evacuation began.

Hana and I packed our rucksacks at night. In the morning of 7th August we left the house. My sister went to the plant hoping that somebody would take us to the railway station, but there was no management left at the plant. They had evacuated at night. Somebody told her that there was a boat on the Dnieper taking people to the railway station across the river. We went on foot. Hana got tired and had to take a rest on the road. Horse-driven carts were passing by. I begged people to take Hana, but they all refused. We finally reached the Dnieper. It was very wide at this certain spot and there was an island in the middle of the river, so actually we had to cross the river twice. Shortly before we arrived the boat was hit by a bomb and sank with all women and children aboard. People on the bank of the river were crying and running along the bank looking for something to cross the river on. Some people were hysterical and jumped into the river trying to swim under continuous bombing. I walked along the bank and found a cracked boat with no paddles. A big man also grabbed the boat and we dragged it to the spot where Hana was waiting for me. We calked the boat, loaded all our belongings onto it and pushed it into the water. Instead of a paddle we used a plank. Some people began to beg us to take them with us, grabbing the boat.

Finally, we moved on. Our fellow traveler rowed with a plank and I helped him with my hands. We crossed the first half, but when we continued it began to rain. My sister got wet and began to cough more and more. As soon as we reached the bank our fellow traveler disappeared. He was probably afraid that he would have to help us. At some point we realized that we didn't know which direction to go. I began to cry and shout. The reeds were set apart and a military man quietly said, 'Shut up, why are you yelling?' He showed us the way to the station and we walked eight kilometers to get there.

There was a train full of people. When they saw my sister they shifted to make some space for us. She looked like she could die any moment. A few minutes later the train was off. When it stopped our fellow travelers brought tea and boiling water for Hana and gave us some food. We arrived in Donetsk [in the east of Ukraine, 500 km from Kiev] and got accommodation in a kolkhoz. The mistress of the house put some straw on the floor and we slept for several hours. In the morning I went to work at the threshing-floor, but my sister couldn't get up. We stayed there for a week and my sister got better. She asked the chairman of the kolkhoz to help us leave because she wanted to get a job she was qualified for. We got some food and a ride to the railway station where we boarded a freight train.

There were Jews from Western Ukraine on the train. They told us about the brutality of the fascists and that thousands of people had been killed. We didn't know where the train was heading. At a big station I went to pick up a package of food given to evacuating people and missed the train. I was standing on the tracks, weeping. A train drove by and the operator asked me, 'Girl, why are you crying?' I told him that my sister was on the train that I had missed, and he took me to the next station where my sister was waiting for me. At last we got onto a passenger train to Kuibyshev. For some reason the train passed Kuibyshev and only slowed down a little when we were already out of town. Hana jumped out of the railcar shouting to me, 'Dora, jump!' I followed her. There were dozens of other people on the tracks. They told us that Kuibyshev was full of evacuated people and that's why the train hadn't stop.

A man sat at a desk in the steppe. He hired people for the construction of the Buguruslan-Kuibyshev gas pipeline. My sister showed him her diploma and we got employed. We were taken to a hostel. Hana became an engineer and I was employed as a cleaning woman for the time being. We were accommodated in a hostel for non-manual workers. There were two other girls in our room. Hana worked there for about a month and a half. Her condition got much worse. She coughed spitting blood. The chief engineer took my sister to a hospital in Kuibyshev. She stayed there through the fall and part of the winter until February 1942. I visited her, but just occasionally because I worked every single day. In February Hana asked me to take her home. A doctor, an elderly Jewish woman, told me that Hana would die within a month and a half. I took her to our room. Her condition was getting worse. A month later Hana, who was confined to bed, asked me to take her back to hospital. She probably didn't want me to see her dying. She was taken to another hospital, not far from us. My sister couldn't walk and was carried on a stretcher.

Hana died at night, on 14th April 1942. Some workers made a coffin and I and a few men got on a truck to go and bury my sister. We didn't bury her in the cemetery because the road to the cemetery was impassable. There were a few graves of people that had died on their way into evacuation near a forest. I buried my darling sister Hana, my closest and dearest one, near the forest. I answered letters from her fiancé Sasha pretending I was her. I couldn't force myself to tell him the truth. When I finally told him that my sister had died, he wrote back a long letter asking me to send him her photographs. I did. I met Sasha by chance around 1960. He told me that he had been at the front and was wounded. He got married after the war. I never saw him again after that.

I continued working at the gas pipeline construction. I became an apprentice to an electric welder in December, and before the end of winter I became a welder myself. It was hard work. We worked in freezing winter and in the heat of the summer. I received 800 grams of bread with my worker's bread coupons. There were special coupons for cereals that I took to the canteen and received a meal in exchange. Before 1943 we were starving, but then it became easier. We received tea and vodka that I sold to buy what I really needed.

As soon as Kiev was liberated in 1943 I began to submit requests for a permit to return. I didn't know where my relatives were: my cousins Olte, Rachil, Fania and Tsylia, my grandmother and grandfather. I didn't even know where Uncle Abram was because I hadn't gone to see him before I evacuated.

I know what happened to my cousins Tsylia and Fania in the 1940s from what they told me after the war. When the Great Patriotic War began many old Jews stayed in town believing that Germans

would be decent and polite like they had been during World War I. Besides, no evacuation of the population was organized. Before the war Tsylia, her husband and her daughter lived in Krasnoye, and Fania and her family lived in Tomashpol. Her husband Ruvim Koltun was recruited to the army on the first days of the war. Tsylia's husband was also at the front. In July 1941, when German troops occupied Tomashpol, Tsylia and her daughter were visiting Fania. She couldn't leave the town. The sisters, along with other Jews of Tomashpol, were among a group of Jews convoyed to another location. Only a few Jewish specialists were allowed to stay in town: tailors, shoemakers and glass-cutters that were needed to do work for the Germans. Blacksmith Moshe, Tsylia's and Fania's brother, was among those allowed to stay. Many people were dying on the way, and others that couldn't keep going were brutally killed by policemen.

Tsylia and Fania tried to stay together. They took turns carrying Fania's younger son. They reached a horrific concentration camp known as 'the dead loop' in the town of Pechora [under Romanian occupation]. They were taken to that area, fenced with barbed wire, where they didn't get any food or water. Every now and then people got something from local Ukrainians. Tsylia and Fania managed to escape through a hole in the fence to beg. The Romanian guards were careless believing that Jews had nowhere to escape to anyway. Even if they tried to make an effort to escape they would die, not far from the camp.

Some inmates had their relatives pay ransom to free them; the Romanians were greedy for gold and money. At some point Tsylia's mother-in-law came from Krasnoye to pay ransom for Tsylia and her daughter. She bribed the guards and they allowed her to take Tsylia and her daughter home. At the last moment, when the horse-driven cab began to move, Fania pushed her older son Yan onto the cab. She begged her sister to take care of him. When winter began - and it was a severe winter in 1941 - Fania and her younger son left the camp at night. Fania decided to try her luck hoping that there would be somebody to rescue them. In any case they wouldn't have been alive for long in the camp. She went to the nearest village and came to the first house. Although she didn't look like a Jew with her fair hair and her bulbous nose, it was impossible to take her for anyone else because she spoke Russian and Ukrainian with a strong Jewish accent. The mistress of the house understood right away where Fania came from. She let Fania and her son in, gave them plenty of food, washed them, gave them clothes and food for the road. She showed Fania a house in the village where she needed to go.

It was the house of the village head, who was in contact with partisans. At night Fania and her son knocked on the door of this house. When the door opened and they went in, Fania almost fainted when she saw four policemen playing cards near the stove. There was a bottle of self-made vodka, pork fat, bread and pickles on the table. The man told Fania to take it easy saying that those 'policemen' were partisans. They invited Fania to have a meal with them. She asked them to help her get to Tomashpol. One of the partisans took her to a crossroad and told her to stop the third sleigh passing by and ask the people to take her home. And, it worked. Fania let the first and second sleigh pass by and stepped onto the road to stop the third one. She was taken to her brother Moshe in Tomashpol.

Moshe was happy to see his sister. He told her that he didn't have money to pay ransom for Fania. When Tsylia's mother-in-law went to save Tsylia he had asked her to pay ransom for Fania as well, but she refused. On the following day Ilyusha, Fania's little boy, died. When Fania and her brother were taking the small coffin to the cemetery, they met a Romanian man in a carriage that stopped

them and took Fania with him. He called some policemen, yelled 'partisan' and ordered them to shoot her. Fania kept begging him to allow her to bury her son, but it didn't help. One of the policemen, who knew Fania from before the war, took her to a village with refugees from Bessarabia [21](#). There was a rabbi among them. He started talking with Fania. She told him her horrible story and named all her relatives. The rabbi told the policemen that Fania was a local Jewish woman and had nothing to do with partisans. This helped and Fania began to live with Moshe's family. Some time later she took care of her sister's older son.

They had a hard life. All Jews in the village had to go to work for over three years. In March 1944 the Soviet troops liberated Vinnitsa and Tomashpol. Tsylia and Fania's husbands returned home after the war. Fania gave birth to a boy, Ilia, named after the baby that had died during the occupation, in 1946. Her husband Ruvim was severely wounded during the war. He died in the middle of the 1950s, and Fania lived with her older son's family in Chernigov for many years. She died in 1993 at the age of 83. Her younger son Ilia and his family live in Israel. Tsylia, her daughter and her husband moved to the US. We didn't correspond and I have no information about their life there. Moshe, his wife and his three children lived in Tomashpol. He died in Tomashpol in 1970, and his children moved to the US in the late 1970s. I don't know what they do.

I returned to Kiev in June 1944. I didn't have a place to stay and went to the Ukrainian family that had once given me shelter. They accommodated me again. A month later I got a job as an electric welder in a plumbing trust. I received a salary of 1,000 rubles. I got back the room where I had lived while I was working at the Central Post Office. I got a one-month assignment to restore the mines of Donetsk, along with several other workers, in September. When the month was over we were told that we had to stay for another six months. I left the place without permission, but the management didn't have a problem with that. Shortly after I returned, I was sent to a one-year course of advanced training at the Institute of Electric Welding. I received a stipend of 300 rubles, which wasn't enough to live on. Uncle Abram found me soon after he returned from evacuation and we cried after Hana together. He began to support me like he did before the war. I met my cousins Rachil and Olte that had been in evacuation during the war. I knew that my father's mother Surah died.

My cousin Olte told me that Grandfather Srul had let my father know that I survived and was in Kiev. My father asked him to tell me to write to him. I was in a conflict: My father had left us and we were suffering. At the same time I was longing for a father's warmth, or, just wanted to know that there was someone of my own kinship. In the end, I did write to my father, beginning my letter with the words, 'Hello, my unknown father ...'.

He came to Kiev immediately, brought me gifts and money and bought me clothes. My father told me that he and Evdokia lived in Leningrad. They had two children: Boris, born in 1922 and Volodia, born in 1928. My father was at the front, wounded and treated in a hospital in Teheran, where he met his older son Boris. That was the last time he saw him: Boris perished in 1944. Evdokia died during the blockade of Leningrad [22](#). Their younger son, Volodia, was taken out of town via the 'Road of Life' [23](#) and survived. I never saw Volodia; all I know is that he lived in Leningrad after the war.

I forgave my father and loved him. He was a very impulsive person; when he liked someone he poured kisses and gifts onto that person. The problem was that he was too full of love and for that

reason he had left my mother. In 1947 my father married Lisa, a Jewish woman. This was his third marriage. They lived in Leningrad. He often wrote me, but he only visited me two or three times, always bringing gifts. I couldn't afford to go to see him, but I always wished him well on all holidays. My father died in Leningrad in 1968.

A few months after my father and I first met, he began to insist that I got married. I used to see young men before. One of them, Izia from Tomashpol, asked me to be his wife. However, I didn't love anybody. Perhaps, my heart wasn't made for love, or, maybe I had given all my love to Hana. My father made arrangements with a shadkhan - matchmakers that still existed in small towns, even though they did their business secretly. When they found a decent young man that proposed to me. I gave my consent under my father's pressure.

My fiancé Leonid Postrelko was born in 1914. He lived with his parents in Kiev before the war. His father Pinhus and mother Malka perished in Babi Yar [24](#) in Kiev. They must have been religious, but I didn't know them. Leonid was at the front and received several awards. My father gave us money for my wedding. I had a long, white gown with a long train. We got married in summer 1946. There was a chuppah in the only operating synagogue in Podol [25](#). My father wasn't religious, but all relatives from both my mother's and father's side insisted that I had a traditional wedding. The wedding party took place at Olte's house. My relatives and friends came to the wedding. There was traditional Jewish food on the table including gefilte fish. The guests ate and drank, danced and sang, and shouted, 'Bitter!' [Editor's note: This is a Russian tradition. Guests shout 'Bitter' to the bride and bridegroom asking them to sweeten bitter alcoholic drinks with their kiss.]

Well, we separated after three months. I didn't love Leonid, but I was young and needed a man. He couldn't give me the joy of fleshly love and a few weeks after the wedding I took a lover: one of the workers in our trust. After I left my husband, he came to see me and was very angry with me. He wrote a letter to my lover's wife. She came from Uman and took him back home. I remained indifferent to this incident, too: I didn't love my lost lover either. I never saw my husband again. I know that he lived in Kiev and was married. I think he's probably dead by now.

I had a few men in my life, but I didn't want to share my life with any of them. I'm alone. I have no children. It was also due to my illness: I began to walk with a stick in the fall of 1946 when I had osseous tuberculosis. I was confined to bed for two years. I had two surgeries and was declared an invalid. I couldn't do hard work any longer and worked as an attendant in a hospital, as a janitor and, later, I made aprons at home.

However, I always tried to be cheerful. When my condition became more stable I began to attend a Ukrainian folk choir that went on tours to many towns of our country. I often went to health recreation centers on vacation. I could stay there for free. I took part in amateur art activities, liked singing, cracking jokes and playing tricks on people. I had friends and cousins that visited me when I was ill. Sometimes we spent time together. We went to the cinema, walked in parks, celebrated Soviet holidays and had parties. They had family responsibilities though and therefore I often didn't have any company. I couldn't afford going on vacation and besides my health condition didn't allow me to travel. I spent my evenings working or watching TV. I retired in 1978. I receive a minimal pension since my salary had been very low.

I never faced anti-Semitism in my life. People have always treated me nice. Of course, I read in newspapers about anti-Semitic campaigns in the late 1940s [the campaign against 'cosmopolitans']

[26](#) and the early 1950s [Doctor's Plot] [27](#), but they had no impact on me. When Stalin died I didn't cry like others did. I didn't care.

I received a room in a communal apartment in 1966 and that's where I still live. I've always tried to observe Jewish traditions, at least, a few of them. I couldn't celebrate Saturdays because it was a working day in our country, but I always fasted on Yom Kippur. After the war I went to the synagogue on that day. I always had matzah on Pesach and I celebrated this holiday with my cousins Olte and Rachil.

Many of my relatives moved to Israel and US. If I hadn't been an invalid I would have moved there, too. I've always been attracted by Israel. I believe this is our common motherland.

Perestroika turned out to be a severe trial for me, just like for many other lonely pensioners. We get miserable pensions, just enough to buy bread and milk. However, there are positive signs, too. I think it's good that the Jewish way of life has revived in Ukraine. Hesed provides great assistance to me. They take care of me. It's not just words; Hesed doesn't only mean material support - kind words and information about Jewish cultural life are equally important. We are involved in various activities related to Jewish customs and traditions. I used to attend meetings for elderly people at Hesed daytime center. Two years ago I fell and had a fractured neck of femur. Hesed came to help me. Visiting nurses from Hesed helped me to survive and begin to move. I can only move in my room with the crutches, but I'm alive and I want to live on. That's all that matters.

Glossary:

### **1 Communal apartment**

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

### **2 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

### **3 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.

#### **4 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.

#### **5 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

#### **6 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

#### **7 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

#### **8 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

#### **9 Whites (White Army)**

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very

common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

## **10 Greens**

members of the gang headed by Ataman Zeleniy (his nickname means 'green' in Russian).

## **11 Pogroms in Ukraine**

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

## **12 Gangs**

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

## **13 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.

## **14 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during WWI. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **15 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

## **16 Rabfak**

Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.

## **17 Kolkhoz**

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

## **18 Young Octobrist**

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

## **19 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.

## **20 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.

## **21 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

## **22 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the

town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

### **23 Road of Life**

Passage across the Ladoga lake in winter. It was due to the Road of Life across the frozen Lake Ladoga that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

### **24 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

### **25 Podol**

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

### **26 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

### **27 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.