

# Lidia Lieberman

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: L. Grinshpoon

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*Lidia Lieberman is a short woman. She lives with her husband Naum Balan in a 2-room apartment with furniture from the 1970s: a living room set, a table and a sofa. There are a few colorful landscapes and portraits on the wall; they were painted by her husband's brother Michael. He is a professional painter. Lidia likes to sit on the balcony. She talks with her friends and acquaintances on the phone. There is a miniature tenant in the apartment: the cat Vasiliy who is usually sitting beside his mistress.*

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## Family Background

My paternal grandfather Yakov Lieberman was born in Zvenigorodka, Kiev region, in the 1860s. [Zvenigorodka was a district town in Kiev province; its population in 1897 was 16,923; Jews constituted 6,389. In 1909 there was a Talmud-Torah and three Jewish schools for boys.] In the late 1880s he married Leya, a Jewish girl. None of our relatives remembered my grandmother's maiden name or her date of birth. Grandfather Yakov had a small business of some kind. He had a good conduct of accounting. My grandfather told me that in Zvenigorodka they had a small house and an orchard. In 1934 grandfather and grandmother sold their house in Zvenigorodka and moved to their older daughter Raisa in Odessa. Shortly after they moved, my grandmother had a heart attack when she was taking a bath in a public bath. The door of her cabin was closed and when they discovered what happened it was already too late. My grandmother was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. I don't know whether it was a Jewish funeral. After my grandmother died grandfather Yakov moved in with my father. He had some money and my parents sold their room in a communal apartment and bought a 3-room apartment with the help of an estate agent. I remember grandfather Yakov well: he was a round-faced man of average height. He had thick dark hair with streaks of gold and a small beard. He wasn't religious. I don't remember him praying at home. He wore plain clothes like other men of his age in Odessa. Grandfather Yakov had fluent



Yiddish, Ukrainian and Russian. He wrote poems in Russian and borrowed my manuals and dictionaries to check mistakes. He composed verses for birthdays and holidays. On holidays he always went with my parents and me, to my mother's parents living in Odessa. In 1941 during the Great Patriotic War 1 grandfather Yakov, his daughter Raisa and granddaughter Zina evacuated to Alapayevsk, Sverdlovsk region [2,350 km from Odessa] in the Ural where grandfather died in 1943 at the age of 80. Grandmother Leya and grandfather Yakov had 12 children in Zvenigorodka. Only eight survived: five sons and three daughters. All children got education.

My father's older brother Bention Lieberman was born in Zvenigorodka in 1889. During the Great Patriotic War he lived with his family in Dnepropetrovsk. Uncle Bention was a pharmacist and his Jewish wife Cherna taught at primary school. They had two children: son Matvey and daughter Rosa. They learned to play the violin in a music school. I know that my uncle was very proud of his children through his life. In our family we called him 'the father of musicians'. They were in evacuation in Sverdlovsk [in Russia]. David Oistrach was there with his students during the war. [David Oistrach, 1908–1974, was a Soviet violinist, pedagogue, one of the greatest musicians of the XXth century.] He auditioned Bention's children and took them to study in Moscow. Matvey and Rosa lived in a hostel. Their parents returned to Dnepropetrovsk after the war. After graduation from a conservatory Matvey taught at the Music College in Dnepropetrovsk and played in the Philharmonic. Later he moved to Novosibirsk where he was professor and dean at the conservatory. Rosa also graduated from Conservatory, violin department under the guidance of David Oistrach. She married a violinist, a Jewish man. His last name was Strugatski. They had two children. Rosa played in the State symphonic orchestra of the USSR. I met uncle Bention in the middle of the 1970s when he was over 80. He was interested in the history of our family and corresponded with all relatives. I met my cousins when they visited Odessa. Rosa came on tour with a State symphonic orchestra and Matvey came to symposia in Odessa Conservatory with his students from the Novosibirsk Conservatory. Uncle Bention died in 1973. His wife died in the early 1980s. Now Matvey Lieberman lives some where in Israel and Rosa lives in Moscow.

My father's older sister Raisa Zin'ko was born in Zvenigorodka in 1891. She became a widow in the 1920s. I don't know who her husband was. She lived in Odessa with her four children: sons Abram, Izia and Monia and daughter Zina. My grandmother and grandfather were eager to help her and moved to Odessa to be at hand. Raisa had a very difficult life, but she gave education to all children. They lived in a 3-room apartment in Hospitalnaya Street. Their windows faced a small dark yard with a toilet and a water pump. Older sons Abram and Izia got married before the Great Patriotic War and lived with their families. In 1941 all three brothers went to the front. Monia and Abram perished. Izia returned home. Raisa, her daughter Zina, and grandfather Yakov were in evacuation in Alapayevsk. They returned to Odessa after the war. Raisa died in 1946. She was buried at the Second cemetery. Her son Izia Zin'ko finished the Polytechnic College and worked as an engineer at the confectionery factory. He has two daughters. His older daughter moved to Israel back in the 1970s. Izia hadn't talked to her for a whole year before she left. He was a member of the Party and repudiated her, for Soviet power considered those who emigrate abroad to be 'traitors'. Relatives or acquaintances delivered letters from her to his wife in secret, but she was afraid of writing her daughter back. When their daughter was leaving she and her husband were divorced and she was not allowed to take her son with her. Her parents raised him. When Izia died in the 1980s his widow and grandson moved to Israel. The boy got served in the army of Israel, got married and has two children. Raisa's daughter Zina married a Jewish young man who was her

neighbor. His last name was Taubenschlag. Zina finished Lingvin [Odessa College of Foreign Languages]. She was an English teacher at school. Zina's older daughter Raisa named after her grandmother finished the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Odessa University and her younger daughter Alla finished a music school. Zina is 81. She writes me letters every now and then.

My father had another brother – Isaac, born in Zvenigorodka in 1895. All I know about him is that he married a Russian girl. Their daughter's name was Lena. Uncle Isaac lived in Kerch. He perished at the front in 1941. I have no information about his wife.

My father's brother Grisha, born in Zvenigorodka in 1898, lived in Belgium. Grandfather Yakov told me the reason why he moved, but I don't remember the story. Grisha was married. He sent parcels and money to his father before the Great Patriotic War. During World War II Grisha was in a partisan unit in Belgium. Somebody reported on him when he came to see his wife one night. He was captured and hanged. Uncle Grisha's wife wrote Bention about it after the war.

My father's younger brother Abram, born in Zvenigorodka in 1900, lived with his Jewish wife in Dnepropetrovsk before the Great Patriotic War. He must have got a good education since he knew Latin and French. Uncle Abram was a pharmacy interior designer. During the Great Patriotic War he was a private at the front. His first wife Eva was an assistant doctor. She worked at a hospital at the front. Eva left my uncle and married a colonel during the war. After the war uncle Abram lived with his sister Sonia in Kiev for some time. Aunt Sonia was trying to arrange for him to get married, but nothing came out of her efforts. Once he came to visit his relatives in Odessa. There was a Jewish woman whose husband perished at the front renting a room from them. Her name was Tsylia. She was 23 years younger than uncle Abram. They got married in the early 1950s. They rented an apartment and then they bought a cooperative apartment in Cheryomushki district [a new district in Odessa]. Uncle Abram earned well and didn't allow his wife to go to work. Uncle Abram died in 1978, before turning 80 years of age. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery. Tsylia died in the 1990s. They didn't have any children and I inherited their apartment.

My father's sister Lisa was born in Zvenigorodka in 1903. She married a Jewish man whose last name was Warenbud. They lived in Dnepropetrovsk. Her husband worked at the railroad. They had two sons: Volodia and Boris. Boris got in a train accident at the age of 11 and had his leg amputated. He had an artificial limb made for him. He could ride a bicycle and do physical exercise regardless of his handicap. He was a crew leader in an association of invalids. Boris got married at the age of about 40. Volodia lived in Belaya Tserkov. He was leader of a steeplejack crew. Aunt Lisa died in the 1960s. I guess Lisa's husband died in the 1950s. Boris lives in Dnepropetrovsk and Volodia lives in Belaya Tserkov.

My father's younger sister Sonia, born in Zvenigorodka in 1906, lived in Kiev. Aunt Sonia was very cheerful and charming. She was married to Emmanuel Koldertsov. He was a Jew. They didn't have any children, but they had a good and interesting life. Before the Great Patriotic War Emmanuel Koldertsov worked as a correspondent of Izvestiya newspaper in Ukraine. [Izvestiya – News, daily communist newspaper published in Moscow.] He told me that during the Great Patriotic War he worked as a front line correspondent. He got in air raids, but he managed through the war without being wounded. Aunt Sonia was in evacuation in Tashkent. After the war Emmanuel often came to Odessa as a correspondent of his paper and Sonia always accompanied him. Emmanuel was a very sociable and easy-going man. He always had stories or funny jokes to tell and we always enjoyed

his company. In summer they spent vacations in recreation centers in Odessa. I liked to visit Sonia in Kiev when I grew up. I liked the town. Sonia always had guests in her house. I met my cousins Volodia and Boris Warenbud from Dnepropetrovsk in that house. Uncle Emmanuel died in the 1970s. Sonia died in Kiev in 1985 at the age of 79.

My father Moisey Lieberman was born in Zvenigorodka, Kiev province, in 1893. He finished the Commercial College in Kiev in the 1910s and became an accountant. He worked as an accountant for his father in Zvenigorodka. I have no information about his life during the October Revolution [2](#) or Civil War [3](#). In 1928 my father visited grandfather Yakov's acquaintances in Shpola where he met their niece Vera Ostrovskaya, my future mother who came to visit them from Odessa.

My maternal grandfather Shama Ostrovski was born in the 1870s. I don't know where he came from. All I know about his relatives is, that my grandfather's brother David Ostrovski and his wife and their son lived in Zhytomir. During the Great Patriotic War David couldn't evacuate since his wife was paralyzed. During the war they were in the ghetto in Zhmerinka. David was a very religious man. He was one of the leaders in the Jewish community. The community collected money that they paid Romanians for permission to go out of the ghetto. When the front line was coming close to Zhmerinka a Romanian acquaintance informed David that Germans were going to liquidate the ghetto. When inmates heard the car engines in the morning they thought those were Germans coming, but they happened to be Russian troops that broke through the front line and came to liberate Jews from the ghetto. I don't remember when David died. In the 1950s David's son Boris moved to Odessa, but we rarely saw each other. David's granddaughter Lialia Ostrovskaya, doctor of medical sciences, lives somewhere in Israel.

Grandfather Shama lived in Shpola. [Shpola is in Zvenigorodka district, Kiev province. According to the census of 1897 the population of Shpola constituted 11,933 residents; 5,388 of them were Jews. In 1905 there was a charity society, an almshouse, 4 prayer houses and a big synagogue. In 1910 there was a Talmud-Torah and private Jewish schools for boys and girls.] My grandfather owned a small feather pillow and mattress factory. There were few employees working for him. Grandfather's family was wealthy. They lived in a house with a garden. My grandfather wanted to give education to his children. He closed his business and moved to Odessa in 1917. My grandfather and grandmother lived in a big sunny room on the 2nd floor in Baranov Street. I don't know what grandfather Shama was doing during the Civil War. Since I remember him he was logistics manager at the fur factory in Odessa located near the railway station. My grandfather was a tall, broad-shouldered slender and handsome man. At least, I saw him as such. My grandfather had a pointed beard and moustache. He cared about us a lot. He was always worried that grandmother didn't give us enough food. Once grandmother asked him to give me semolina at the dacha. He put in a large piece of butter and an egg. I ate it and felt sick. I even had a high fever. When I had scarlet fever and had to stay in bed my grandfather visited me every day bringing me chocolate and fruit. Grandfather Shama was religious. He knew Yiddish and Hebrew. He attended the synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street regularly before the Great Patriotic War. After the war he went to the synagogue in Peresyp [in an industrial neighborhood in the outskirts of Odessa]. He prayed at home. He liked family gatherings on Jewish holidays when there were 20 or more members of the family celebrating. He told us, children, about the holidays. Grandfather Shama died of a lung disease in 1947. He bequeathed his religious accessories to the synagogue: a tallit, a tefillin and probably something else. I don't know the details. For this grandmother Surah was

granted a seat of her own at the synagogue. My grandfather was buried at the Jewish cemetery in takhrikhim (cerements) according to Jewish traditions. His old friend recited prayers in our house through the night.

My maternal grandmother Surah-Beila was born in the 1870s. I don't know her maiden name or place of birth. Grandmother Surah was a wonderful housewife. She was an excellent cook. I liked hamantashen with poppy seed filling and fludn [pies with nuts and jam]. On Friday evenings grandmother always lit candles. They observed kashrut in the family. Grandmother Surah and grandfather Shama observed Pesach. I remember a big dish in the center of the table, a decanter and special wine glasses around it. Wine was poured in glasses and matzah put on a linen towel. My cousin sister Asia or I were to steal a piece of matzah so that nobody saw us. Of course, they just pretended they didn't see us. I was always shy and so was Asia and we kept pushing each other to avoid doing it. There was a chicken bone, horseradish, a carrot or beetroot and something else – I don't quite remember. Matzah was to be dipped in wine. Adults had to drink four glasses of wine. I also remember that the door was left open for Elijah the prophet to come into the house. During the Great Patriotic War my grandmother and grandfather were in evacuation in Stalinabad [Dushanbe since 1961, 3,250 km from Odessa], in Tajikistan, where we were, too. After the war we returned to Odessa. I remember that after grandfather Shama died my mother and I went to pick my elderly grandmother from her prayer on the Yom Kippur from the synagogue in Peresyp. It was hard to get inside, so crowded it was. Grandmother Surah died in 1961 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery. Grandmother Surah and grandfather Shama had six children: four sons and two daughters. They all finished a secondary school.

My mother's oldest brother Isay was born in Shpola in 1897. All I know about him is that he lived in Kiev. His wife's name was Eva and his daughter's name was Lena. This is all I can say about him.

My mother's next brother Michael, born in Shpola in 1900, lived in Odessa. He was married to a Jewish girl named Tsylia. They didn't have any children. They lived in a communal apartment in Baranov Street near grandfather's home. Michael was an accountant in the district consumer association. Few years before the Great Patriotic War Michael had a severe surgery on his intestines and was unfit for army service. His wife and he were in evacuation in Stalinabad, Tajikistan. He worked as raw material manager in the Tajikistan consumer association. He was a very honest man. When they returned they settled down in grandfather's apartment since they failed to get their prewar apartment back. He was religious and read the Torah that grandfather gave him. He went to the synagogue in Peresyp on holidays. He died in 1978. His wife Tsylia died in 1991.

My mother's brother Solomon, born in Shpola in 1902, lived in Odessa with his family. He died of croupous pneumonia in 1939, at the age of 38. His daughter Musia was 4 years younger than I (she was born in 1933). They lived in evacuation in Stalinabad with us. Solomon's widow Fira remarried after the Great Patriotic War and moved to Moscow with her daughter. Musia calls me every now and then.

My mother's older sister Tsylia, born in Shpola in 1907, lived in Odessa. Her husband's name was Abram Jerusalimski. Their daughter Asia was a couple years older than I. Tsylia's husband was chief accountant at a big plant in Odessa. Tsylia didn't observe any Jewish traditions. During the war they were in evacuation in Tashkent where Tsylia husband's plant evacuated. After the war they



returned to Odessa. Tsylia died in 1980s and Abram died in 1950s. Their daughter Asia Krivosheyeva lives in Odessa. She has two sons. Petia lives in Grodno, Belarus, where he works at the drama theater. He has a daughter. Boris, the junior, lives near us in Odessa. He often comes to see us. His daughter Diana lives in Baltimore, in the USA with her mother.

My mother's youngest brother Pyotr, born in Shpola in 1915, was a professional military this is not the right word. He was the tallest and most handsome of my mother's brothers. He got married when he studied in a military college. His wife Tsylia and daughter Raya who was 4 years old in 1941, lived with us in Stalinabad during the Great Patriotic War. Pyotr defended Odessa. His unit moved to the vicinity of Sevastopol where he perished in 1941.

My mother Vera Ostrovskaya, born in Shpola in 1905, was 12 years younger than my father. I know that my mother studied in a grammar school in Odessa. She could speak French. I remember her speaking French with Abram when he visited us after the war. In the early 1920s my mother had a fiancé in Odessa who was a member of the Party. One day after the Great Patriotic War my mother and I met this man when we were having a walk in Alexandrovski park. I told my father about it. He was a jealous man, but he knew my mother's honesty and decency and there wasn't much ado about it. In 1928 my mother met my father when visiting her aunt in Shpola.

## **Growing Up**

My parents got married in Moscow where my father got a job in 1928. They had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah on 6 November, in Moscow. They also had a civil ceremony. I was born in Moscow in 1929. I lived there with my parents until I reached 4. I remember little about our life in Moscow: my father went to work and my mother read to me, played and walked with me. I liked playing with dolls. Then we moved to Odessa. We lived in a room in a house on the corner of Malaya Arnautskaya and Soviet army Streets and then we moved into a 3-room apartment in Proviantskaya Street that was later renamed to Astashkin Street. We had two connected rooms with a balcony and one separate room where my paternal grandfather Yakov lived. I liked to come to my grandfather's room and look at his desk. My father was an accountant. My mother was a housewife. My father believed a woman had to be at home and look after children. My mother got up very early in the morning. When I got up she had already done shopping at the market and other house chores. My mother liked embroidery. She liked to alter old clothes making an apron, for example, from an old piece. We didn't have a sewing machine so then she sewed with hands. I also learned to do stitch work. I've always liked it. My parents observed some of Jewish traditions. They always observed the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] and fasted every year. On Friday evenings my mother made delicious dinner and lit candles. At Pesach we used fancy crockery. Mother cooked gefilte fish and cooked dishes made of matzah. We often visited my mother's parents on high holidays. Grandfather Yakov went there with us. We spoke Russian at home. Only my father and grandfather spoke Yiddish sometimes. At that time Yiddish was called a 'jargon'.

Before the October Revolution our house belonged to Reznik, an old Jew, and his family. They lived in this house as well. His granddaughter Rita and I were friends. We still keep in touch. Rita's grandfather was a short fat old man, but he was very quick. His wife Reiza was always busy working about the house. They sold milk. The old man delivered milk in milk cans to houses or his customers came to buy milk at his home. In the 1920s he kept cows in the yard of Gaevski pharmacy. I remember running along the tram track to the Starokonny market where cowsheds

were located. The old man and Rita's mother, who was a housewife, took care of the cowsheds. Rita had a sister. Her father Boris worked in the docks. They were in evacuation and returned to Odessa after the war. Rita finished the College of Oil and then a college in Moscow. After finishing the college she lived in Odessa. She married a Jewish man. His last name was Widerman. She has two daughters. They moved to America in the 1980s. We recently received a letter with her photographs with her husband and grandchildren. She has a wonderful husband.

I was a thin and sickly child. Every summer grandfather Shama and grandmother Surah rented a dacha in Lusdorf [today Chernomorka, a village at the seashore near Odessa] where I spent time in summer to improve health. The air of the steppe was very good for my grandfather and prices there were quite reasonable. I played with village children. We ran, caught butterflies, played 'hide-and-seek', jumped a skipping rope and other games. My mother often visited us. She brought food products from Privoz [a big market in Odessa]. My mother liked to spend vacations in a village where one could buy milk, fruit and vegetables at reasonable price. When I went to school we spent summer vacations in Frunzivka and Kodyma [villages in Odessa region]. In Frunzivka we rented a room in a house. The son of an owner worked at school and they had a nice collection of books: Russian and foreign classics. I liked reading lying under a cherry or apple tree in the garden. The owner used to say 'Why lie here? Take a walk to the center'. I got up, went to the center of the village, entered into the only store, looked at the shelves and went back to the garden where I continued reading. In the evening my mother and I used to play dominoes. My mother and I stayed in the village through the summer and my father came there on vacation. When he went back to work, he used to spend his weekends with us in the village. He commuted by train. It took him a couple of hours to get to the village.

My parents always had a Christmas tree decorated and it always lasted until my birthday on 8 January. Our relatives came to my birthday party at 6-7 pm and stayed until midnight. I remember my 6th birthday. It was a cold winter and on this day there was a snowstorm and the ground was covered with ice. There were no guests by 10 pm and my mother suggested that we had dinner. We did and she began to clean up the table when all relatives came all of a sudden. They had Claudia Shulzhenko with them. [Claudia Ivanovna Shulzhenko, 1906–1984, was a Soviet pop singer, whose name is associated with the start of Soviet pop singing.] Her husband Koralli was a distant relative of my mother brother Solomon's wife. The party lasted until early in the morning. Claudia sang. When I went to school I invited schoolmates to my birthday parties. My mother made color carton field caps like children who came from Spain had. [Editor's note: the USSR supported republican units in Spain during the Civil War in 1936–1939. After they were defeated, many Spanish children were taken to the Soviet Union. They wore such color caps.] Brunette children received red or pink caps and blondes received light blue or green caps. Children could take them home after the party.

I liked going to parades with my father on October Revolution Day [4](#) and 1 of May. He bought me a balloon and a small flag on such occasions. There were no members of the Party in our family and arrests in 1937 [during the Great Terror] [5](#) had no impact on us. In 1937 I went to school # 35 in Komsomolskaya Street. I finished elementary school before the war. I only had excellent marks at school. I became a young Octobrist [6](#). My first teacher's name was Elizaveta Grigorievna. She was a Jewish woman. Once, in the late 1940s my mother bumped into her in a street. My mother recognized her, although Elizaveta Grigorievna had grown very old. Elizaveta Grigorievna was

eager to see me. My mother and I bought flowers and chocolates and went to visit her: it was a very moving meeting.

## **During the War**

When the Great Patriotic War began my father went to the army. We accompanied him to the gathering point in the yard of the Water Engineering College on 25 July 1941. My father didn't think we needed to evacuate. He said there was nothing for us to fear while if we left home we might not be able to get food on the way – everything was expensive and we might die.

I associate the first days of the war with fear. When air raids began I was running downstairs skipping three steps. All tenants of our house got together in the basement apartments. Of course, now I understand that if a bomb had hit the house the building would have collapsed and buried us under the debris. My mother had no fear. When an air raid happened when she was doing her needlework on the balcony she continued what she was doing and if asked to go downstairs she answered that she would come to a top and then come downstairs. By the time she finished a pattern the air raid was usually over.

My mother's younger brother Pyotr Ostrovski – he was a military – was packing for his family and his brother Michael's family to evacuate to Tajikistan where his wife's relatives lived. Uncle Michael said 'If we leave and Vera (my mother) and her daughter stay, we shall be responsible for their deaths. Go take them here'. Therefore, the issue of our evacuation was resolved. I remember this day in late August. In the morning grandfather Yakov went to see his older daughter Raisa. I was playing with my friend Rita when uncle Pyotr wearing a hard hat and a military uniform took me by my hand and we went upstairs quickly. My mother had packed two bags: one with winter clothes and another one with summer clothing. She had kept these bags to save some belongings in case of fire emergency. Uncle Pyotr picked the bags, took me by my hand and with my mother we went downstairs, where a truck was waiting for us at the front door. There were other families in the body of the truck. The truck drove us to the harbor where we boarded a ship. In the last minute one family changed their mind and got off the boat. They happened to take our bag with winter clothes by mistake. Later they gave this bag to uncle Pyotr and he took it to our apartment. My mother and I needed those clothes so badly in evacuation. Our boat headed to Novorossiysk, but since there was bombing or something else, we got off either in Nikolaev or Kherson – I can't remember.

We boarded some railroad platforms and moved on to the east. On the way the train personnel tried to make us get off in some kolkhoz twice, but Pyotr's wife managed to convince them to leave us alone pointing at the smaller children. I was afraid of having to stay all by myself losing my mother at such moments. I remember that once we didn't get any bread or water. It was hot and we were thirsty. Younger children were crying. My mother used to give me boiled water, but this time nobody cared since there was only little water that we could get. Once we picked water from a lake on the way – nobody cared about any bugs or worms. At one of the bigger stations where the train stopped, I told my mother that I was dying for a bowl of hot soup. The train was supposed to stand at the station for two hours. My mother took me by my hand. She had her purse with some money and documents in another hand. We remembered the platform our train was on and went to look for a bowl of soup. We had some soup and were about to go back when all of a sudden we remembered that we needed to buy some bread. My mother asked someone where we could find a bakery, but someone mentioned to her that there was a train leaving. Two soldiers were on the



platform. Each of them had a loaf of bread in his hand. They gave us this bread and didn't take any money from us. When we came to the platform where our train was supposed to be it was not there. We were told that the train moved to another platform. We went there and saw it leaving. We ran after the train. Someone lifted me and I screamed 'Mama!' My mother was lifted there, too. Everything ended well.

We arrived in Stalinabad where Pyotr wife Tsylia's relatives lived. One of them worked at the Central Committee of the Party in Tajikistan. They met us, gave us hot water to wash and accommodated us in a room in a kindergarten. Pyotr's wife Tsylia became a teacher in the kindergarten. She was a young beautiful woman full of life. She designed costumes for Soviet holidays and made preparations for celebration in the kindergarten. My mother went to a military registry office to ask for accommodation. She received a big room in the grain supply office in the center of the town. This was a one-storied building with barred windows. There was a shelf, a table and some other piece of furniture in the room. There was also a part of a hallway that we could occupy. Soon there were 8 of us in this room: my mother and I, my mother's brother Michael and his wife Tsylia, grandmother Surah and grandfather Shama, Fira my mother's brother Solomon's widow, and her daughter Musia. Grandfather Shama worked somewhere for some time, but then he got ill and stayed at home with grandmother Surah. Uncle Michael was a very decent and honest man and was well respected and honored. He was logistics manager of the Tajik consumer association and received a nice 2-room apartment soon. I often went to see uncle Michael. Michael's wife Tsylia worked as a telegrapher at a post office. My mother went to work in a diner. At first she peeled vegetables. When they learned that she was smart and educated she was made a waitress and then a cashier. My mother brought some bread and soup from the diner. We could buy inexpensive vegetables: I remember sweet radish that we made salad of. Sometimes uncle Michael wrote me little messages for food storage facilities where we could buy dried melon and apricots. These fruit were only supplied to the front and to hospitals. They were sweet and delicious.

I went to the 5th form of a Russian school where we also studied the Tajik language. I was good at my studies and got along well with my schoolmates. I had a chore helping one Tajik boy to improve his Russian and he helped me with the Tajik language. I can still remember few Tajik words. I liked the town. Its center resembled Odessa a little. There were mountains covered with snow surrounding the town. There were arks with cool water even at the temperature of plus 40 degree Celsius. One summer was so hot that the town authorities even issued an order to make a long interval in the afternoon. I saw women wearing a paranja [a fine black grid of horse hair]. I was surprised to see men wearing cotton wool robes and fur hats. The local residents explained that it was the most comfortable outfit for such heat. I also drank green tea for the first time there. Tajiks are very hospitable people. There were many kishlak [Tajik] villages around the town. We often went out of town after school and when we went across the kishlak local residents, they often invited us to a meal. They traditionally invited all travelers to share a meal with. We sat on the floor where they were eating plov with their hands. They teased us when we couldn't eat with hands. They were mild rainy winters in Stalinabad. We wore ichigi, fine leather boots, and galoshes. Before going inside a house, we left galoshes near the door.

We didn't have any information about my father. My mother's brother Pyotr wrote us from Odessa before occupation that he left my father's letters that he had sent home and the bag with our

clothes at home. They were all gone during occupation. This is how it happened that we don't have a single letter from my father.

My mother's sister Tsylia, her husband and their daughter were in evacuation in Tashkent. Uncle Abram was chief accountant at a military plant and was not subject to service in the army. In early 1944 they sent us some money and a letter where they wrote that we had to be prepared for returning to Odessa. They had included my grandparents, my mother and me on the list of those who were to return to the town. I passed my exams for the 7th form at school and we moved to Tashkent. Tsylia and Abram met us and helped us to find accommodation. We lived in a kibitka hut [nomad tent]. My mother and grandparents didn't work. It was a very cold winter with severe frosts. We didn't have proper clothes to wear. I couldn't go to school. There was a small stove in the hut. Our relatives gave us some fuel for the stove. Life was 3-4 times more expensive than in Stalinabad. We couldn't wait until Abram's plant was returning to Odessa. Grandfather Shama wrote his brother David in Zhmerinka. David replied and sent us an invitation letter that we required for our trip back to Zhmerinka.

My grandfather Shama, grandmother Surah, my mother and I went to Zhmerinka. On the way somebody stole my mother's purse with all documents, including my birth certificate. Life was a little easier in Zhmerinka, but I didn't go to school. I stayed at home reading a lot. Uncle David rented a room for us. We couldn't stay in his apartment since he had to take care of his paralyzed wife. I don't know what he did before the war, but when we lived there he made shoe polish at home. Grandfather Shama wrote a letter to the fur factory in Odessa where he worked before the war and received an invitation to return to Odessa. He went there alone and settled down in his room in a communal apartment. We followed him and moved in with grandfather and grandmother. We celebrated Victory Day [9 May] at home. I went to Deribassovskaya Street [main street in Odessa]. It was a big holiday. Uncle Michael and his wife also stayed in grandfather's room when they returned in 1946. We lived together since my uncle failed to have his apartment back. My grandfather died after a long disease in 1947. An old Jewish man who we knew recited Kaddish for him in synagogue. He bequeathed his tallit, tefillin and maybe some books to the synagogue in Peresyp. He left a Torah to his son Michael. Grandmother Surah lived with Michael's family. She died in 1961 and was buried beside grandfather Shama.

## **After the War**

In late 1947 we received an official notification that my father was missing in action. We had our apartment given back to us. We had two connected rooms back, and a separate room was occupied by a Russian woman. We got along well with her. My mother went to work at a haberdashery shop where they manufactured brooches, buttons, clips, etc. She earned 600-700 rubles. I went to study at the 8th form in school for girls #36. In the 9th form I joined Komsomol [7](#), but I never took an active part in the public life. On holidays our teacher of physics invited boys from the artillery school where he also taught physics, or we went to parties in their school. I also had friends. Once I met my friend Rita's acquaintance Naum Balan. He was a student of the Communications College. Many years later he became my second husband. We got together for parties: we played lotto, danced and had fun. Naum sometimes accompanied me home. He lived in the hostel of his college near my home. However, there was not a sign of a romance between us. We didn't see each other for months. Then he showed up in Rita's company again. Naum had a camera and we have quite a number of photos where we are together.

After finishing the 9th form my friend Galia, a Jewish girl, and I decided to go to study at the Dentist Faculty in medical school. Galia's father was regional chief rontgenologist. He explained to me that there was high competition for this faculty and the course of studies was 3 years. He advised me to try the Prosthodontic Faculty. I did and received a diploma of a dental technician. I got a job assignment in Novaya Vorontsovka, Kherson region. My predecessor was a dental technician with no diploma, but he had experience and equipment and all clients were his, accordingly. I only received a desk and a stool. I went to the Medical Equipment store in Kherson to buy the equipment I needed, but there wasn't much on sale. I came to an agreement with a shop assistant and he informed me when I had to come to the store to get what I needed. I traveled to Kherson a lot. Sometimes I had to spend up to 10 days there. I could stay with my aunt's friends, it wasn't quite convenient. I often went to Odessa on these days. I rented a room and the hospital reimbursed my expenses. When I was in hospital, I often worked at the registration office, although I was eager to do the job I was hired for. I spent there one year and 8 months. I still didn't have all equipment I needed. I went to the medical care department in Kherson, explained my situation to them and resigned from hospital. I cannot say anything about the Doctors' Plot [8](#) since it somehow went past me. I've never been interested in politics.

I returned to Odessa in 1953. It was difficult to find a job. There was high competition. I didn't have either money to buy equipment or influential acquaintances, which could help me to get a job. My former fellow students changed their profession to something different. Uncle Michael helped me to get a temporary job with document control in a company for invalids. My neighbor and friend was a bacteriologist in a clinical laboratory in the regional hospital. She advised me to accept a job in the laboratory of pathological anatomy. She said they had a good team of employees there. I agreed. Director of the laboratory professor Chayutin, a Jew, was a short and deaf man. He had a hearing aid. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, before the occupation, he was arrested by military patrol several times. They suspected him of espionage. They probably thought he had a camera in his hearing device. But then they set him free. Professor asked me whether I was afraid of corpses. I answered that besides my grandfather I had had no contact with corpses. He said that one should beware of living people that could hurt. I was employed for a probation period with no payment. Chayutin was a very captious, but fair manager. He was a very educated and intelligent man.

I got adjusted to my new job and colleagues. There were few Jews in the laboratory: doctor Sophia Vladimirovna Derbarindiner – we all adored her –, and a lab assistant. I never faced any anti-Semitism. My colleagues treated me with respect. We made a great team together. At Easter our Russian colleagues brought Easter bread and other treats and I brought matzah at Pesach and hamantashen at Purim. My Jewish colleague, the lab assistant, kept her nationality a secret and our colleagues showed less respect toward her.

A day before Stalin's death in 1953 I had a tooth pulled out. Something went wrong and I had hemorrhage at night. My mother took me to a dental clinic in the morning. I was having my gum sewed up when we heard that Stalin died. I went to work. Oh, Lord, everybody was crying. They couldn't imagine life without their leader. I was also sorry.

One of my friends introduced me to a young man who had just finished his service in the army and returned to Odessa. His name was Grisha Gaber. He was one year older than I. We met for about 9 months before we got married in 1953. We lived with my mother in our apartment in Astashkin Street. Grisha worked at a plant. He earned well and we had a good life. He had wonderful parents.

His father Israel Gaber, a very handsome man, was a Party official. During the Great Patriotic War he was at the front. He took part in the defense of Odessa. He was wounded and shell-shocked. This had an impact on his health. He died after he had had few strokes in the 1950s. Grisha's mother Sopha, a housewife, lives in Hospitalnaya Street. Grisha's older brother Boris, a former military, lives with his family in Tairovo [new district in Odessa]. I keep in touch with them.

My mother-in-law rented a dacha in summer and we lived there. Grisha was not quite fond of traveling, but we did travel every now and then. We took a cruise on the Black Sea. The ship stopped in the ports of the Crimea Caucasus. Grisha and I took a tour to Leningrad once and another time I went there with my colleagues. Once Grisha's friends took us to Riga on a driving tour in their car. We went via Kiev, Minsk and Vilnius. It was a great tour. We stayed with Grisha's relatives in Riga. Grisha and I lived together for 20 years. We didn't have any children. We didn't observe Jewish holidays and didn't go to the synagogue. I divorced him in 1975. I got tired of his love affairs. We got a divorce in court, but we divided our property ourselves.

My mother died in 1981. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery. After my mother died my ex-husband and I exchanged our apartment: I got a big room in a communal apartment in Chelyuskintsev Street. I had my furniture moved there and bought a TV and a fridge. I lived alone. In the 1970s, 1980s I often stayed in recreation centers in Odessa: four years in a row I stayed in the recreation center named after Gorky getting medical treatment for my intestines and stomach. I also stayed in Lermontovskiy recreation center and in the center in Bolshoy Fontan. Then I went to take mud treatment in Berdyansk. I spent vacations in Leningrad or in Kiev where I stayed with my aunt Sonia. I spent all my free time with my closest friend Rita Reznik.

In 1982 I resumed relations with my acquaintance, Naum Balan. He lived in Soroki town in Moldavia. Rita wrote him about my situation. Naum wrote me a letter and then came on a visit to Odessa. Naum cared about me: he visited me on all Soviet holidays – 1 May and October Revolution Day, New Year and on my birthday. I also visited him in Soroki. He was an engineer in the operations department in a construction company and went on numerous business trips. I joined him when I had few days off at work. Sometimes we went to Tiraspol where his younger brother Michael lived with his family. I met his favorite nieces: Luda, the oldest, lived with me when she studied in Odessa Construction College. The younger one Tatiana studied in Tiraspol, in Pedagogical College. Naum has always been fond of theater and cinema. We've been to all theaters in the town. We often went to museums and art exhibitions.

My health condition became much worse in the late of 1980s. Once, when I was going home by trolley bus from the railway station after seeing off Naum, the trolley bus pulled off and I fell. Other passengers helped me to get off at the nearest hospital where I got first medical aid. However, I didn't feel well and had to go to hospital where they diagnosed concussion of the brain. It took me few months to recover. One night I slipped and fell. I broke my leg and injured my face. I had to go to hospital where doctors were giving me a certificate of an invalid, but I explained that I had to go back to work, I couldn't live without work. I worked until 1994.

In 1995 with Naum we decided to live together. He sold his apartment in Soroki and moved to Odessa. My aunt Tsylya left me her one-room apartment in Cheryomushki [a new district in Odessa]. We exchanged this apartment and my room for a 2-room apartment with balconies and all comforts in a new district of the town. Our apartment is on the second floor. This is a very

important factor for us since we are old people and there is no elevator in the house. Gmilus Hased provides great assistance to us. They provide food packages, pay for medications, visits to a doctor. Volunteers help us about the house. I hardly ever leave my home. I call relatives on the phone. Boris Krivosheev, my cousin Asia's son, often comes to see us. He lives nearby. He comes to do hard home work about the apartment since Naum cannot do hard physical work. We read Jewish newspapers in Russian Or Sameach and Shamrey Shabos that publish news of the Jewish life in Odessa and about Jewish holidays and traditions. We have the Torah my grandfather Shama left to my mother's brother Michael. Naum and I decided to give it to the Jewish museum. We've read in a newspaper that this museum was founded in Odessa in 2003. We didn't observe Sabbath and the Jewish holidays.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 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.

### **2 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.

### **3 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.

### **4 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great



October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

## **5 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

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

## **6 Young Octobrist**

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

## **7 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.

## **8 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.