

Maya Dembo

Maya Dembo

St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Lyudmila Lyuban

Date of interview: October 2002

Maya Gerasimovna Dembo, a woman of 71, looks younger than her age;

she is very energetic, in spite of her heart disease.

She has a short haircut, grayish hair and is elegantly dressed.

She is an intellectual, there are newly published books on her table.

She lives alone in a two-bedroom cooperative apartment without any expensive furniture.

It is very neat and ideally clean with a lot of paintings on the walls, including those, painted by her relatives.

She is hospitable, her relatives and friends visit her often. She is a wonderful cook, and a nice and intelligent woman. It is a pleasure to talk with her.



- [My family background](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [Post-war](#)
- [School years](#)
- [Married life](#)
- [Glossary](#)

• My family background

My name is Maya Gerasimovna Dembo. I was born in Paris in 1931. I would like to express my gratitude to my cousin, Semyon Sivashinsky, the son of mother's brother Vulf, for the assistance he provided me with for this biography. He told me for this interview about his family and other Sivashinsky relatives.

My paternal grandfather, Isaac Dembo, was born in Riga [Latvia] in the 1870s. He had some kind of technical education, but I have no detailed information. He worked in the timber processing and paper industry. He died at an early age, in 1914, when my father was only 14 years old.

Grandfather Isaac was sick with diabetes and tuberculosis. During his last years he lived in the Crimea, in Yalta, where the climate is drier and warmer than in the Baltic region and suits a consumptive person better. He died in Yalta. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery, but we weren't able to find his grave after the war. I have no information about his family or his siblings.

My paternal grandmother, Sara Lazarevna Dembo, nee Bugg, also had a Jewish name, Sorel. She was also born in Riga in 1865. The Bugg family was wealthy; they owned a fur factory in Riga named Electra. This factory was one of the first in Europe, which learnt to make mouton out of sheepskin, a shining fur with a soft flexible base. They really succeeded in it. They also had a dairy farm near Riga, in Saulkraste, so they were a fairly well- to-do family.

Grandmother Sara had several siblings, though I know little about their life. I only heard from my father that her brother Max Bugg, who owned the factory in Riga, anticipating the movement of the Reds [1](#) to the West, to the Baltic region, took his family and moved to Stockholm in Sweden in 1936 or 1937.

He lived with his wife there. Some of his children lived with him and one of his sons, Natan Bugg, obtained education either in Cambridge or in Oxford and found himself in Riga. Right before the war he married Yudit; she was an art expert. Their fate brought them to the Middle Asia during the war.

After the war they returned to Riga. Natan was a talented engineer and worked at the famous Riga carriage construction plant, which produced cars for electrical trains. They are still used by our St. Petersburg subway. Another one of Grandmother Sara's brothers - his name is unknown - found himself in Riga occupied by the Germans, and perished tragically. The fascists threw him into the burning synagogue. Other relatives had managed to escape from Riga before the Germans arrived. Some fled to the East, some the West.

Grandmother Sara didn't get any education, she was a housewife. She got married in the 1890s, they lived in Riga and had three children: Aron, my father Gerasim - his Jewish name is Gerson - and Cecilia. Regardless of the fact that grandfather died early and grandmother was left alone, she tried to provide the children with education. I believe, her well-to-do brothers supported her financially. All her children finished a classical gymnasia and obtained education abroad, in Europe.

The German - not Yiddish - language was the mother tongue of Grandmother Sara's family, because the German influence was very strong on the Latvian culture at that time, especially so in Riga, the capital of Latvia. All members of the family spoke Latvian and German; grandmother Sara and Aunt Cecilia, who lived most of their lives in Latvia, spoke it perfectly; my father and Uncle Aron spoke it less well.

They all spoke Russian well, Cecilia spoke without any accent and her brothers had a slight accent. Grandmother Sara wasn't religious, as far as I remember, she was a secular woman. She died in Riga in 1959.

My father's elder brother Aron Isaacovich Dembo - they called him Ronya at home - was born in Riga in 1898. He finished a classical gymnasia in Riga and later graduated from Berlin University. He was a chemist by occupation and worked all his life in the field of oil-processing. In 1937-1938 he married Olga Lvovna Tsymbal and their son Lev was born.

They lived in Leningrad. They were aware of their Jewish origin, but were secular people having little in common with Jewish traditions. Olga Lvovna was a doctor- roentgenologist and worked at Leningrad Pediatric Institute. Aron was in the chemical forces at the frontline during the war. Right after the war he worked at some plant in Leningrad. There was an explosion at that plant, Aron was

considered guilty and was put into prison. I remember how some ex- prisoner came to our place and gave father a note from his brother. My father hired various attorneys and finally my uncle was released.

Later Aron was working at the oilfields in Bashkiria with a center in the town of Ishimbay. He spent most of his time in that town. He bought a Volga car in 1958 before he retired. [Editor's note: a Soviet car mark, very expensive and prestigious at that time.] He was returning to Leningrad via Moscow in this car along with his colleague. The car was hit by a dump truck and they were both killed. Uncle Aron was buried in Leningrad in the Jewish Preobrazhensky cemetery.

My father's younger sister Cecilia Isaacovna Dembo was born in Riga in 1904. When she was nine years old, she was run over by a street railway car and lost her leg; she had a prosthesis afterwards. This circumstance left a certain imprint on her further personal life. She had a good education, she finished a classical gymnasium in Riga, graduated from the medical faculty of Tartu University and later improved her education in Prague with Voyachek, who was very famous in the world of medicine. She traveled a lot, went to Italy and France. Cecilia was a very good otolaryngologist. She was a secular Jew, far from religion. She lived with her mother, my grandmother Sara, in Riga.

During the war, while in evacuation in the Urals, Cecilia worked in a polyclinic. After she returned to liberated Riga, she continued with her medical activity. She treated the opera singers' vocal chord illness; she was on friendly terms with the famous tenor Alexandrovich, and knew the academician Tarle very well. [Editor's note: E. V. Tarle (1875-1955): a famous Soviet historian of Jewish origin, one of the most prominent specialists in the history of Russia, France and international relations at the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century.]

Cecilia was an extraordinary person, though she didn't have any personal life; she was never married. She adopted and raised Alexander Genkin, her cousin's son, and gave him her last name. Alexander was born in Paris, his French mother left him in his early childhood and then his father died. Alexander Dembo became an artist, worked as a teacher at the Riga Academy of Arts, faculty of industrial aesthetics. I have his paintings at home. Cecilia died in Riga in 1981.

My father, Gerasim Isaacovich Dembo, was born in Riga in 1900. In 1918 he moved to Petrograd with his mother and sister Cecilia because of Cecilia's illness. He finished a classical gymnasium located on Vosstania Street and met my mother there. My father's family lived in the center of Petrograd, on Grechesky Lane. My mother's family lived nearby. After finishing the gymnasium my father started to work at the Oktyabrskaya Railroad as a stoker to earn a living. My grandmother and her daughter returned to Riga and Gerasim stayed in Petrograd.

I remember not only my maternal grandparents, but also my maternal great- grandparents, the Neimotins. My great-grandfather's name was Ovsha, he was a very handsome old man and resembled Moses by Michelangelo, with a gray beard, which seemed silver to me. I loved to sit in his lap and pull at his beard. My great-grandmother's name was Pesya, she wore a very long skirt, which surprised me, because everybody already wore short skirts at that time. She always put her hand under her skirt - she must have had a pocket there - and gave me candies.

They lived in 44 4th Sovetskaya, the whole apartment formerly belonged to the Neimotins; later they were 'packed' and when I knew them they lived in a small long room, which was all crammed

with bookcases full of books in Yiddish and Hebrew. All books were age-old, with golden stamping in leather binding. My great-grandfather always read books, no matter when I came to visit. He read some big books with signs unknown to me, and he turned the pages in the direction opposite to the standard. My great-grandparents were quiet, calm, nice and smiling people, and very religious. According to some information my great-grandfather was a rabbi before the [Russian] Revolution [of 1917] [2](#). He prayed a lot. They didn't attend the synagogue at the time I remember them, because they were sick people and it was difficult for them to climb to the six floor, where their apartment was located, so they prayed at home. They died during the blockade of Leningrad [3](#) in 1942.

Their daughter, my maternal grandmother Khana-Feiga - common name Anna - Yevseyevna Sivashinskaya, nee Nemoitina, was born in St. Petersburg in 1881. Grandmother Khana had two brothers, Samuil and Avron; and two sisters, Musya and Leya, but I know little about them. Musya died early. Leya and her family left for the USA via Middle Asia at the beginning of World War II by some very difficult means.

Avron had a very good voice and absolute pitch. Two of his daughters live in St. Petersburg, they are old women by now and very sick. They sang very well when they were young; it was their hobby. Khana didn't get any education; she got married at the age of 19 and was a housewife.

My maternal grandfather Moisey - Jewish name Moishe-Isik - Vulfovich Sivashinsky was born in 1877. According to the birth certificate of his son Vulf, Moisey Sivashinsky was considered Polotsk petty bourgeois. I don't know when his family moved to St. Petersburg, but according to my mother, all children in the family were born in St. Petersburg. Maybe they were only registered in Polotsk. Everyone called grandfather Mshaisik.

Grandfather Moisey had two sisters, Rakhil and Fruma, and one brother, Sinay. His elder sister Rakhil - common name Rosa - Vulfovna Vilenskaya was born in 1880 in St. Petersburg. Regardless of the order accepted in the religious Sivashinsky family, she graduated from the medical faculty of Bestuzhev, became a doctor and married the revolutionary Vilensky. He was an associate of Lenin - he worked with Lenin during his stay in Switzerland and was later buried as an honored figure in the Kremlin Wall

[Editor's note: The Kremlin Wall behind Lenin Mausoleum was the most honored burial place in the USSR. There are urns with the ashes of the most prominent figures of the Communist Party and the USSR.]

After the wedding Rakhil and her husband left for Switzerland in connection with his revolutionary activity. However, they got divorced after some time in Switzerland and she moved to France, Paris, where she lived all her life.

Aunt Rakhil was a very good pediatrician and worked in Rothschild hospital. She invited her niece and her husband - my parents - to visit her in 1924 and they stayed at her place for ten years while my father studied at the Sorbonne. I was also born in France. My aunt didn't have children of her own and she liked to play with me a lot. I called her Aunt Rashel in the French manner. When my father got his diploma, Hitler had already come to power in Germany and Aunt Rakhil started to persuade my parents to leave France and return home, which they did.

She remained in Paris occupied by the Germans. My mother found out later that Aunt Rakhil got into a raid, after which she was sent to Auschwitz where she perished in 1942. There are documents confirming everything: an official notification #85926, issued by the International Red Cross, certified by the German Consulate in Leningrad. The name of Rakhil Vilenskaya is indicated on the memorial plate installed at present on the Rothschild hospital wall, where she had worked. The names of employees, who perished in the battle against fascism, are listed on this plate. When I was in Paris, I saw that memorial plate and the building on 8 Rue de Prague, where I lived the first years of my life.

My grandfather Moisey's younger sister, Fruma, was born in 1883. She did not get any education and was a housewife. She lived in Leningrad. Her husband, Isaac Yuzvinsky, was an engineer and was very fond of sport, especially football. They both perished in besieged Leningrad in 1942 and were buried in the Jewish cemetery. Their three sons perished at the frontline. The elder son perished at Karelian Isthmus, north of Leningrad, in the war with Finland [Soviet-Finnish War] [4](#). Two younger sons perished during the Great Patriotic War [5](#). Only their daughter survived. She graduated from Leningrad Polytechnic Institute as an engineer-metal expert. She lives with her family in the USA now.

Grandfather Moisey's younger brother, Sinay Sivashinsky, born in 1887, was an important economist and worked in a bank in Leningrad. He was arrested in 1937-1938 [during the so-called Great Terror] [6](#) and served time in the camps of Solikamsk. He spent 10 years there and was rehabilitated after Stalin had died [Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union] [7](#). His elder son perished at the frontline. His younger son, a doctor, was also in the war, but survived. He lives in Moscow now, has a daughter from his first marriage and a son from his second marriage. Sinay also moved to Moscow during his last years, where he died in the 1970s.

Grandfather Moisey, as well as grandmother Khana, came from a religious Jewish family. The Sivashinsky family came from the kohens. Kohens have the highest level of sanctity, since their assignment is to serve at the temple and to perform sacred work. Any service at the synagogue compulsorily includes a kohen: for instance, if ten Jews gathered, they had the right to start the prayer, but there should be a kohen among them. Yiddish was the mother tongue of grandparents Khana and Moisey; they also spoke Russian rather well and correctly, but preserved Jewish 'singing' intonations in their speech. They kept kosher and observed all fasts; celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays; prayed a lot and attended the synagogue often.

Grandfather Moisey was a rather important figure in the Jewish community of Leningrad. He was a shochet and a mohel. As a shochet he was acknowledged by the synagogue and had the right to ritually slaughter the cattle. As a mohel, he obtained the right from the Jewish religious community to perform the ceremony of circumcision for boys on the eighth day after their birth. Grandfather did it very professionally in sterile sanitary conditions. His daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Vulf, was a pharmacist; she brought him bandages and other necessary sterile accessories.

The performance of this ceremony was of ritual character and required certain courage on Grandfather Moisey's side, as the Soviet Power didn't only unwelcome, but also persecuted the ministers of religious cults [during the struggle against religion] [8](#). He was ranked among such people, that is why he was 'deprived', he was disfranchised and deprived of other rights. I remember old Jews often came to visit Grandfather Moisey.

They spoke quietly about something, discussed something and prayed together. His opinion was highly evaluated. Visiting my friends once when I was already an adult, I mentioned by incident my mother's maiden name. Guests of venerable age exclaimed, 'Oh! So you are Mshaisik Sivashinsky's granddaughter?' It pleased me very much to see that grandfather was well-known and remembered.

Grandmother Khana and Grandfather Moisey lived in one apartment with my grandmother's parents, the Neimotins. My grandmother liked that the apartment was located on the sixth floor, she said that she liked high stories, because there was a lot of light up there, closer to the sky and farther from the earth. I remember a big beautiful escritoire of Karelian birch with a lot of various drawers. I loved when the cover of the escritoire was opened and I could open and close those drawers.

There were bookcases with ancient books in the long corridor; unfortunately, they were all burned in the siege. The entrance to the apartment was from the backstairs. There was a big refrigerated cabinet in the kitchen, built into the wall below the window. Such a fridge was traditional for that time. The stove was a wood-burning one and Primus stoves were placed on it.

There was also a small cast iron basin. Near it stood a huge oak sideboard, one half of which was used the whole year round and the other contained everything that was used for the celebration of Pesach. Grandmother prohibited everyone to touch those dishes for the rest of the year. All Jewish traditions were piously observed. They celebrated all the holidays when the whole family would gather, they kept kosher and prayed even at home twice a day.

Grandfather Moisey and grandmother Khana got married in 1900. They had the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, with a chuppah. They had six children: Frida, my mother, Vulf, Sima, Maria, Iosif and Polina.

My mother's elder brother, Vulf Sivashinsky - they called him Vladymir at home - was born in St. Petersburg in 1904. His birth certificate is well preserved. After his bar mitzvah at the age of 13 he became a rabbi's disciple, it was an official status. He was taught by his grandfather Ovsey Neimotin and would have become a rabbi, if it hadn't been for the Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Vulf Moiseyevich had always been a man of ideas. At first, it was the idea of serving the Jewish religion.

After the Revolution he suffered a moral crisis and turned away from religion into the opposite direction: atheism of extreme kind. He wasn't able to obtain systematic education, not even elementary education, because of the Civil War [9](#). He worked as a watchman, as a worker at the clothes factory and Murmansk railroad, as a sailor on Ladoga Lake and as a scraper in 'Utilsoyuz'.

In 1922 Vulf entered the adult workers' school and in 1935 without interruption of work graduated from the chemical faculty of S. M. Kirov [10](#) Light Industry Academy with almost all excellent marks. He was a very talented person.

Being a chemical engineer, he engaged himself with such a boring subject as processing secondary scrap. He worked as the head of 'Soyuzutil' in Leningrad from 1937 and up to the beginning of the war.

He got married at an early age, when he was 19, to Esphir Berkovna Starobina, a friend of his sister Sima; they studied together at the pharmaceutical technical school. After finishing school Esphir worked in a drugstore. Their first son Mikhail was born in 1924 and in 1940 they had another son, Semyon.

They lived with Esphir's parents in a huge communal apartment [11](#), which belonged to the Starobins before the Revolution. When the Great Patriotic war broke out, Esphir and Semyon got evacuated to Omsk, Siberia.

Vulf and his elder 17-year-old son Mikhail volunteered to the front. In September 1941 Mikhail perished in the battle near Gatchina in Leningrad region. Almost everyone born in 1924 like he was murdered in this war: they were just 17, nothing but schoolboys, with no experience of a soldier, so they would perish in the very first battle. Mikhail was everybody's favorite in the family. His father participated in the war, was in Zapolarye, Poland, Hungary, Austria and Germany. He served in chemical forces, was an army officer, a major, with battle awards. He was wounded and partially lost his hearing in the war. After the war he returned to his former job and held high managing positions up to 1958 in the raw material processing industry. Regardless of his bad hearing, his employees loved him very much and simply spoke louder in his presence.

My uncle Vladymir had a sense of humor and liked good literature, the Great Russian poet Pushkin [12](#), especially his novel in poetry, Eugene Onegin. Uncle Vladymir told his wife, 'Take your ear-trumpet. Oh, what a big flaw deafness is.' [Editor's note: quoting poet A. S. Griboyedov (1795-1829): Russian playwright, poet and diplomat, contemporary of Pushkin.] He considered Yiddish and Russian his mother tongues. He often spoke Yiddish at home with his wife and his Russian was absolutely correct without the slightest intonational Jewish peculiarity.

He remembered Hebrew, the language of the Torah until the end of his life. When during his last year he lay sick in bed, his wife's nephew Yuly came to him to study Hebrew. Yuly is now the biggest expert on Jewish customs and culture in the family. He is very much interested in the subject.

Vladymir was a man of high culture, but uncontrollable and hot-tempered. It was good that his hot temper was restrained by the culture. He was a brilliant lector; he gave lectures on chemical methods of scrap processing for specialists. At the end of his life, along with his colleague Slivker, he was occupied with the invention of a machine for technical rags degreasing, they called it cavitator because its function was based on the hydrodynamic cavitation.

They produced a pilot machine, tested it for a long time, but it was never put into mass production. In 1958 Uncle Vladymir obtained incapacity for work and retired. He died in 1963, both he and his wife were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Leningrad.

Uncle Vladymir's son Semyon graduated after World War II from the mathematical-mechanical faculty of Leningrad State University, though it wasn't easy for a Jew to enter it. A brilliant mathematician, he started to work as a student at the Leningrad department of Steklov Mathematical Institute [Editor's note: It is now the leading economical-mathematical institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.] He still works there. He married a Jewish girl early, at the age of 19, just like his father.

He has a daughter and a son. His daughter graduated from Leningrad Polytechnic Institute and lives with her family in the USA now. His son graduated from two institutes: the Bonch-Bruyevich Leningrad Institute of Communication and later, having understood, that his mission was medicine, he graduated from Leningrad Pediatric Institute. He worked on probation for three years in the USA, defended a Ph.D. thesis on chemotherapy and is now a brilliant oncologist at Leningrad Oncological Center at Pesochaya station. Grandfather could have been proud of such grandchildren.

One of my mother's sisters Serafima, or Sima Gutman was born in St. Petersburg in 1907. She finished the pharmaceutical technical school in 1924 and worked at the Blood Transfusion Institute as a laboratory assistant. She was a very intelligent biochemist. Her husband Israel Gutman was a construction engineer; he was often sick. They lived in a tiny room of nine square meters with their small sons. After World War II they moved into a small apartment with great difficulties. They raised three sons, who graduated from Leningrad Fine Mechanics and Optics Institute, got married and have grownup children and grandchildren. Two of them live with their families in the USA and one lives in Israel.

Aunt Sima was an angel by temper. She never spoke loudly, she was always very tender, smiling, cordial and sympathetic. She helped me during the hard period in my life, when my husband fell sick with sarcoma. His blood formula had to be restored after radiological procedures. My aunt's advice helped us a lot. She left for the USA with her husband and younger son in 1992. She fell sick along with her husband and they died on the same day. He had a stroke and she had an infarct. It happened in 1998.

Another sister of my mother, Maria or Musya Starobina was born in St. Petersburg in 1911. She was a quiet, charming woman with blue eyes and delicate features. She worked as an accountant at Lenin Munition Plant. She married the brother of Uncle Vulf's wife, Samuil Starobin, and they had a daughter. They lived in a small room along with Samuil's parents. Musya's husband worked at the aircraft plant and was a highly qualified worker with, as they say, 'magical hands'. He could do absolutely unique things.

My father until his dying days shaved with a razor that Samuil made for him, and liked it very much. Aunt Musya died early, in 1955 at the age of 44 of rheumatic heart disease. The whole family was shocked by her death. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

The Sivashinsky family was exceptionally friendly. The whole family jointly raised Musya's 12-year-old daughter. Certainly, Uncle Vulf and his wife took the biggest part in it, as they lived in one apartment. Musya's daughter graduated from Leningrad Construction Engineering Institute and became a construction engineer. In 1972 she emigrated to Paris with her husband and son. She works as a translator from French and English in various technical fields.

Her son works with her. They have a small translating company of their own. She got divorced, but she preserved good relations with her husband and they work together. She visited us twice. I also visited her in Paris. She told me that she still remembered how Aunt Frida, my mother, carrying loaded bags, had visited her mother at the hospital.

My mother's younger brother, Iosif Sivashinsky, was born in 1914. He was a very wise man and his wisdom harmonized with his secularity and merriness. He was a very good electronic engineer.

When he was young, he suffered from his father's being a minister of religious cult. Iosif worked at a plant, which produced projecting and cinematographic equipment and decided to enter a technical school attached to the plant.

However, he had great difficulties to enter this school as he was a member of the family of a 'lishentsy' [Editor's note: 'lishentsy', or deprived citizens of the USSR, members of the so-called 'former classes' who were disfranchised; in particular, when entering higher and secondary educational institutions.

According to the Constitution of 1918, this category included people who before the Revolution of 1917 had used hired labor, received interest on investments, been involved in trade and commerce, clergy, agents of the pre-revolution police, mentally handicapped persons and convicts. They were deprived not only politically, but often also of civil rights.]

They managed to solve the problem with great difficulty. Iosif finished this school and later on worked with navigation devices as an engineer. He lived with his wife and daughter in one apartment, along with Grandfather Moisey and Grandmother Khana. I remember very well his wife Tasya, who died at a young age of cancer. She was German, her father was subject to repression and she was scared of everything. Tasya, not being a Jewess, was very much loved in such a religious family as my grandparents Sivashinskys'. She was quiet and nice; a real dove.

During the war Iosif worked in besieged Leningrad. At the end of 1944 he was sent to the Far East on the threshold of the war with Japan [13](#). After the war Iosif and his daughter worked in a secret organization and were 'rejected' for a long time; they weren't allowed to go abroad. Later they moved to the USA. Iosif knew Jewish traditions very well. Since he was a kohen, he was often invited to the Boston synagogue to commence the service.

He did go, though he thought that Judaism possesses superfluity of small details of ritual specifics, but he had a humorous attitude to it. Iosif knew the history of the Sivashinsky family very well. My cousin Semyon told me that when he visited Iosif, in two days he found out more about his family, than he was able to find out during his whole life. Iosif died in 2000.

My mother's younger sister Polina Berlina was born in 1917. She worked since her youth at Krasnaya Zarya factory, which produced telephone sets. She loved theater very much and attended the theatrical studio attached to the Leningrad Children's Theater. She recited poems very well. She married Zalman Berlin, who graduated from Leningrad Bonch-Bruевич Institute of Communication and, being a telecommunications worker, also worked at the Krasnaya Zarya. He was in the war, always carrying a box and a cable spool, repairing the communication system; he was wounded. Zalman died a long time ago. Polina has two children, a daughter and a son. They all live in the USA now.

My maternal grandparents, Moisey and Khana, lived in besieged Leningrad during the war and in 1942 they were among the last ones to get evacuated across Ladoga Lake [via the so-called Road of Life] [14](#). They traveled in a troop train long and grievously. My grandfather had a sense of humor, he was a merry and easily amused person with sly eyes. He didn't lose his sense of humor even in such hard times. He told us the following story later: When they left Leningrad, they collected some belongings and took a kettle among all other things.

They asked one of the young men, who jumped out of the train car, to bring some boiled water in the kettle. Everyone drank water from the kettle and everyone was surprised at the taste of the water. When they drank all the water, they found a felt hat in it. They traveled for a long time in that train and finally arrived at Omsk, where their relatives had been evacuated to before.

They returned to Leningrad in 1944, when the siege had been lifted. They kept the Jewish traditions till the end of their life. My grandfather died in 1953 and grandmother died a year later, in 1954. They were buried in the Preobrazhensky Jewish cemetery in Leningrad.

The children weren't religious but they respected their parents' belief, that is why they tried to bury them observing the Jewish ceremony. I remember especially when Grandfather Moisey was buried. All mirrors were covered. [Editor's note: according to Jewish tradition all the mirrors in the house with a deceased are covered to facilitate the wandering of his soul in the next world.] It was very quiet in the apartment, everybody sat squatted down or on very low benches. It wasn't allowed to cry. My grandmother kept her composure.

Relatives didn't have the right to carry the coffin. [Editor's note: a dead body is considered unclean, and it is not allowed to touch it so as to avoid desecration.] Everybody slightly tore their clothes as a sign of sorrow. Coffins were painted red at that time, but according to the Jewish ceremony, if a coffin was used, it had to be made of plain boards, non-painted. This red paint had to be cleaned off, which was very difficult to do, as it was deep-seated in the wood.

Grandfather's body was wrapped in a shroud. The shroud was sewed, as it should be, out of brand new unwashed fabric. The candles were burning. At first the coffin was placed at the synagogue. I remember very well, how Uncle Vladymir stood on the perch of the synagogue at his father's funeral and didn't enter it because he was a communist.

There were men and women beside the coffin. It all happened at the synagogue near the Jewish cemetery; it was already dilapidated at that time. The cantor sang. The kaddish was recited at the cemetery. My grandmother was also buried according to the Jewish ceremony, but I don't remember her funeral so clearly for some reason.

My mother, Frida Moiseyevna Dembo, was born in St. Petersburg in 1901 and was the eldest child in the family. She finished a gymnasium and entered the Live Word Institute, such was the name of today's Drama Institute at that time. She was taught by the famous actor Davydov and in spite of her young age, promising in the typical theatrical role of old women in Ostrovsky's plays. [Editor's note: A. N. Ostrovsky (1823-1886): Russian playwright, whose plays, both tragedies and comedies, laid the foundation for realistic Russian drama.] She had a very well-pronounced artistic talent and she studied well; she liked it all very much. When she married my father, she was only 19 years old. My parents got married in 1920.

My father continued working at the Oktyabrskaya railroad. First he worked as a stoker, then he moved further up to the position of train driver assistant. At the same time he entered Polytechnic Institute and combined work and studies. It was rather complicated as it fairly exhausted him, which worried his mother a lot. She lived with her daughter in Riga at that time. Relatives decided that his parents should go to Paris, where my father should continue his studies at the Sorbonne. The Government of the USSR allowed it at that time. The sister of my mother's father, Rakhil, lived in Paris at that time and agreed to accept my parents. In 1924 my parents left Petrograd and my

mother had to quit her wonderful institute. They lived for several months in Riga, where my mother was introduced to all my father's relatives, and after that they left for Paris.

• Growing up

They lived in Paris for ten years with mother's aunt, first at one place and later they moved to Rue de Prague, 8 - it was the Rothschild foundation building. Aunt Rosa assisted them financially; besides, they earned money. My father studied at the faculty of applied mechanics of the Sorbonne affiliate in the town of Nancy and worked at the Worthington machine- building plant. He attended some course at university, did an exam, went back to work, attended another course, passed the exam, went back to work and so on. That is why he studied at university for such a long time, for ten years. My mother worked as a seller in a store and did some other jobs. I was born in 1931 and was the only child in the family. When my father obtained a Sorbonne diploma in 1934, they had to decide what to do next. My mother loved her parents and siblings very much, she missed her family a lot when living in Paris. Besides, Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 and his speeches worried the neighboring countries. So in 1934 we all moved to the Soviet Union, to Leningrad, which had already been renamed after Lenin's death in 1924.

Upon our return from France my father started to work at the Leningrad Metal Plant [LMP], which was the first domestic turbine producer. He worked at the special design bureau, which designed pumps. My father was a man of great erudition, possessed vast knowledge and spoke several languages. He knew German, French and Russian perfectly, and he translated from English, but I never heard him speak English. He knew Greek and Latin a little bit. He never learnt Russian but he was absolutely literate and edited all documents for the pumps. He was very hard-working. Besides his main job, he did translations in order to earn some extra money. I remember that very often, when I went to bed, he still sat at the desk, leafed through the magazines and translated articles.

My father was a man of intellectual labor, but he could do anything with his hands, he could even repair shoes. He repaired his car himself and applied to a mechanic only in case of very serious problems. He was a hot- tempered man, but suppressed all 'explosions' inside himself. He smoked a lot, but, being a strong-willed man, gave up smoking, when he was required to do so. He was rather quiet and non-talkative with those whom he didn't know well, but with his friends he was a sunny and smiling person, very charming, sometimes naive as a child and his circle of friends loved him very much. My father was very stylish and knew how to dress. Once he sewed himself a working overall with a lot of pockets out of some rag, and preserved elegance even in that overall. Black-marketers very often bothered him about his clothes. He was an extraordinary person, a bright man.

My mother worked in the graphics department of the Hermitage and translated inscription on etchings from French into Russian. [Editor's note: the Hermitage is one of the greatest art museums of the world, established on the base of private art collections of the Russian emperors.] My mother was very elegant, fine-molded. She was a sociable person, very communicative and artistic. She sang well - low soprano - had a fine pitch, unlike my father and imitated Vertinsky wonderfully, including his gestures. She had an imperious temper, as all Sivashinskys, sometimes she was a despot; she liked to have everything done her own way. However, at the same time she was rather delicate and didn't worm herself into anybody's soul. My parents were educated and modern people; they weren't religious.

When we returned to Leningrad in 1934, I was three years old. Since my mother began to work at the Hermitage, I attended the kindergarten for Hermitage employees' children.

I visited my grandparents often, because my parents expected to be arrested every day. Many people in this country lived in fear of arrest and repressions during those years before the war. That's why I was sent out of the house with the story that mother had tonsillitis and I could catch an infection. I went with grandmother to Nekrasov market-place, where she bought live hens which lived for some time in the big fireplace. Later grandfather Moisey slaughtered the hens according to the rules. I liked chicken cooked by grandmother; she was a wonderful cook. She handed over her cooking talent to her daughters.

• During the war

In the summer of 1941 we planned to visit Grandmother Sara in Riga, but then the war broke out. I was already a schoolgirl before the war, but I was evacuated with the kindergarten to Yaroslav region. I remember clearly how I walked along Nevsky prospect [the main street of Leningrad] with a rucksack. We were sent to the Volga river and my parents stayed in Leningrad. Our troop train with children was in-between those trains that headed to the frontline and the Germans bombed us all the time. There was no unbroken window glass left in the train car.

We sat under the benches covering our faces with our hands. Finally we reached our place of destination. It was the village of Iskra in Yaroslav region. We were distributed among the nicest, charming Volga citizens; they were the kindest people! We were washed and fed. I remember also the cold touch of tweezers on my face, which were used to take out small pieces of glass. We lived there, went to school and did agricultural work. I was taught to crop and collect vegetables.

My parents stayed in besieged Leningrad. My mother continued working at the Hermitage. When Kalinin's [15](#) instruction arrived about the evacuation of the LMP to the Urals, my father was recalled from the home guard. They got loaded onto the troop train and left, but my mother got off the train earlier, near the town of Buguruslan, and found me.

When she came to pick me up, we were all sick, there weren't enough adult workers, and all children were sick with dysentery. She helped to treat us, using homemade means, certainly, because no medical assistance or medicine was available. Later, having said goodbye to the hospitable villagers, I left with my mother to the Urals, where my father was.

In 1940 Latvia was annexed to Russia. When the Great Patriotic War broke out in 1941, Riga already had some information about the Germans persecuting Jews in Poland. Thus when the Germans approached Riga, my grandmother and her daughter Cecilia escaped with the retreating Red Army, taking only a bundle with belongings and a small suitcase with Cecilia's tools with them.

They left with the last trucks and found themselves in Pskov region. Later my grandmother somehow found out where her younger son Gerasim got evacuated with his family and they reached us at the beginning of 1942 in the Urals.

They came absolutely lice-ridden, exhausted and more dead than alive. Since their mother tongue was German they spoke German at home; in spite of the war and bad attitude of the population towards the Germans. But the landlords lived separately and nobody heard it. In 1943 my

grandmother, her daughter and her son's family moved to the town of Podolsk in Moscow region and in 1944 they both returned to liberated Riga. A bomb hit their house and nothing remained of it, not even the foundation, so they had to start from scratch.

LMP was evacuated to the village of Verkhnyaya Salda, not far from Nizhny Tagil [a town in Ural region, about 2,000 km from Leningrad]. Those were places, where convicts used to live, which had been exiled there by the Russian tsar Peter the Great [16](#). First metallurgical plant were also constructed there by Demidov [a famous Russian entrepreneur of the 18th century]. The LMP engineers, clever and educated people, recalled from the home guard - just like my father - to produce turbines, were starving to death. There was no medical assistance, no medicine.

My parents also suffered from dysentery because of hunger. They lay and periodically lost their conscience. When my mother came to her senses, she told me what to do, 'Wash your hands, dissolve some manganese crystals, go to the store, buy cognac or vodka, ask the owner for some curds...' Then she fainted again. I did everything as she told me and my parents survived. This was in 1942. As soon as they were up on their feet again, and my father could go to the LMP affiliate and my mother to the polyclinic, where she worked at the registry office, my father's mother and sister arrived. They were also more dead than alive. We all lived in a log cabin - a house made of timber. Our landlords had two houses; they gave one to us.

My father worked at a dairy in his childhood and he knew how to deal with horses. He asked our landlords for a horse and we went with him to the forest to get some wood. We chopped trees and sawed the dead wood. I stood in snow up to my chest in -50 degrees Celsius. However, the air is very dry in that area and such frost can be endured more easily than in Leningrad, where the air humidity is too high and where I often fell sick with tonsillitis. In the Urals my tonsillitis was cured forever. We stoked the Russian stove [17](#) with the wood and warmed the big house.

In the Urals, in the village of Verkhnyaya Salda, where the plant, where my father worked, was evacuated, I went to school again, but we didn't really study there; we fought with the local children instead. They beat us seriously, because we were weak, constantly hungry and stole food from their school bags.

They always ate very delicious and nourishing food, brought milk and shanezhki to school. [Editor's note: shanezhki are potato pastries, covered with sour cream and baked in the Russian stove.] Certainly, they didn't share anything with us. I faced anti-Semitism there for the first time in my life. We were called 'plucked-out jews'. I came home and asked who 'plucked-out jews' were. They explained it to me. But the strangest thing was that they called all evacuated people, even Russians, 'plucked-out jews'. Obviously, the local inhabitants thought that only Jews were evacuated. I didn't make friends with anyone there; we struggled for existence.

In 1943, according to Kalinin's instruction, those employees of LMP, who survived, were again loaded onto troop trains and brought to the town of Podolsk. There was a big boiler plant there. The plant produced boilers for electrical stations, and LMP made turbines. My father was occupied with the production of pumps in Podolsk. After the siege, the LMP employees returned to Leningrad and their families came back later.

My mother and me returned to Leningrad in June 1945. Father came back with his plant earlier. I remember Nevsky prospect very well, which we drove along in a truck. I looked at the empty, as if

extinct, city and at the houses with dark and nailed up windows, pasted with straps of paper. We entered Palace Square: empty, not a soul, depressing silence. The gray Neva river with waves. The sight was terrifying.

- **Post-war**

Our house #27 on Dobrolyubova Street, where we had lived before the war, hadn't remained intact; a bomb hit it. My father got a room in a communal apartment in building #23 on the same street. The room was on the second floor, it was a pillbox during the war, our soldiers shot from it. My father had to break off the bricks from the window openings with a crow-bar and to make new windows. The room was crammed with furniture, gathered from the whole building and everything had to be taken out. The communal apartment was rather big, designed for six families.

There was a kitchen with a wood-stove and a wash-basin, where huge fat rats sat, well-fed on the corpses during the siege. Those rats were afraid of no one. There was also a tiny toilet, which didn't work properly. Torn electric wires and pieces of wallpaper hung from everywhere. Nevertheless, little by little, neighbors appeared and life returned to normal.

My father continued to work in his former position at the LMP. Later on their special design bureau was transferred to the Economizer Plant, which produced pumps, so he began to work there.

My mother didn't have special medical education, but learnt a lot working at polyclinics during the evacuation in Verkhnyaya Saldy and in Podolsk. Thus, having returned to Leningrad, she found a job at a tularemia infection station, which was located not far from our house on Tatarsky Lane. They dealt with extremely dangerous infections there: plague, encephalitis, tularemia.

Tularemia is a glands' illness, like plague. My mother wore a mask, rubber gloves and a tightly closed overall at work. They developed a serum against infections, studied insects and other infection carriers' behavior, for which purpose they caught musk-rats.

The employees went to the country where an infective epidemic was registered; for instance, my mother went to the Karelian Isthmus, when an encephalitis epidemic was registered there. [Editor's note: Karelian Isthmus: land bridge, connecting Russia and Finland, situated between the Gulf of Finland in the west and Lake Ladoga in the east. St. Petersburg and Vyborg Saint are its chief cities.] She took me with her on that trip. We were vaccinated beforehand. We lived in a wooden house. My mother took part in the research and she took me with her because I had severe avitaminosis and furunculosis, and I needed fresh air and forest berries.

There were really a lot of berries, but it was dangerous to walk in the forest. Everything was completely neglected, a lot of barbed wire, shells, missiles everywhere. This was 1946-1947. Resettled people from the Volga river, from Yaroslavl region, lived there. I ran around the forest with boys, we collected some weapons, shells and hit them. Once when we were doing it, some demobilized soldier shouted terribly at us because we could have easily blown ourselves up. Fortunately, everything turned out to be successful. My mother was a very intelligent person, she managed to cope with everything she did.

In the postwar time my parents loved to go to the theater and concerts; they especially liked [Arkadii] Raikin and [Klavdiya] Shulzhenko [both popular Soviet variety artists]. My parents had a

lot of friends, whom they welcomed at home with pleasure and whom they visited, too.

Their friends were of various nationalities, not only Jews; my parents were people of cosmopolitan nature, they would live well in any part of the world. I think they developed such a trait when they were young and lived in Paris for ten years. They didn't like chauvinism, either Russian or Jewish.

We didn't go to the summerhouses in summer because my mother didn't like all these buckets, pans, oil-stoves. My parents bought a Moskvich car: private cars weren't common yet at that time, but already affordable for well-to-do families. We drove to the Crimea and the Caucasus, in our own car. But most of all we liked to go to the Baltics: to Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and the Lettish farm at the border with Estonia, where our close friends, Latvians lived - though I don't remember anything special about the time we spent there.

As of 1955-1956 my mother didn't work anymore, she just kept the household; but she didn't manage to collect documents required for obtaining a pension. My father worked until he was 82, though not at the Economizer Plant, but at various other places, since my mother didn't get a pension, and they had to live on something. My father died in 1988 and my mother died a year later, in 1989. They were buried in the regular cemetery, not in the Jewish one.

• School years

I went to school after the war. It was a girls' school and I didn't like it. The teachers constantly dragged me to the toilet and made me wet and comb my curls. They didn't believe that I had such hair by birth. The hair became even curlier when wet. I had real fun, but my mother was summoned to school. I cannot say that I was oppressed because of my nationality, but playing in the yard, I heard sometimes 'Jewish mug!', and I thought: what can I do? I faced real anti-Semitism when I entered the institute.

I finished school in 1951, since I lost about one and a half years because of all these evacuation trips. I wanted to enter the philological faculty of Leningrad University, but my parents advised me to not even try to submit my documents there, in order to save time, strength and nerves, as Jews weren't accepted to university openly at that time. I got the same advice from Natasha, my friend and neighbor in our communal apartment. She was two years older than me, Russian and studied at the faculty of law.

I submitted my documents to Leningrad Library Institute. I passed the entrance exams fine, got one 'good' mark and the rest were 'excellent'. However, the entrance examination commission asked me to bring an excerpt from my parents' biography, explaining why I was born in Paris.

Were my parents white emigrants or not? Why did they live there? A Jewess and moreover, born in Paris! My father wrote an explanation, I entered the institute with difficulty, but studied well and with pleasure. We had a very strong literature sub-faculty, consisting of famous Russian and foreign literature specialists, who were driven away from the university, for being Jews or so-called 'cosmopolitans' [18](#), who weren't exiled to far away camps so far.

After graduation I was assigned to work at the Kola Peninsula in the town of Kirovsk [mandatory job assignment] [19](#). The following order existed at that time: nonresidents were left in Leningrad and Leningrad residents were sent to remote locations, so that they 'would not stir up trouble'. I worked

in a library in Kirovsk. Being a 3rd-year student, I did my practice in Murmansk. I'm very grateful to my lucky stars that I got to know this wonderful land. I've been to Murmansk, in villages at the very border with Norway.

I had to check various libraries and drove from one to another in a sleigh harnessed with dogs. Since Kirovsk was a town, where apatites were mined and where convicts' camps were located, I was assigned to give them some lectures. There were various convicts, including political ones, there were really a lot of them. They worked at the mines and the concentrating factory, where the apatite ore was concentrated. I lived in a barrack, the wind created huge snowdrifts in winter. I was constantly sick, I was awfully allergic to the apatites - it is considered a hazardous production - and the lack of oxygen in the air.

There exists such an anomaly, though there are no mountains anywhere around. By the way, the same anomaly has been registered in Kostomuksha, Karelia. I began to write applications asking for permission to go back to Leningrad. Of course, I left for home for all the holidays. My colleagues at the library treated me very well, they understood that I was a 'mother's girl' and took care of me as much as they could.

Once I got into real trouble. Terrible snow-storms occur in that area. At that time I didn't live in Kirovsk, but 25 kilometers from the town, close to the mines, where the ore was extracted and later on delivered along a narrow-gauge railroad to this factory in Kirovsk. I lived with the mother of my friend Natasha, who by that time had already passed away. Our parents were friends, when we lived in one communal apartment and Natasha's mother, Alexandra Nesterovna, loved me very much. I went to work by bus. When the snow-storm started, no one was at home and Alexandra Nesterovna, a doctor, was at her work-place at the preventorium.

Being a law-abiding person, I set out to work. Something terrible happened outside, nothing could be seen, not even the lampposts, there was snow up to the chest, the wind was howling and it was possible to walk only sidelong. I tied my kerchief around my head, like a mask and walked, as there was no transport. I was walking by touch, from post to post. I left the house at 9 in the morning and came to work late at night, it was always dark there at that time, because the Polar night starts in that area in November.

So I appeared in front of my colleagues in the form of a huge snow-ball. What happened to them when they saw me! They scolded me, kissed me, unpacked me, massaged me, warmed me and gave me vodka to drink. I spent the night in the apartment of our manager, Tatiana Alexandrovna. There were actually a lot of Leningraders in Kirovsk; very intelligent people, who found themselves in that area against their will in the course of Stalin's repressions. They managed to stay decent and kind in those harsh conditions; they were always ready to help. The atmosphere was special there, I never ever felt the same in my life. So I waited throughout the snow-storm with them. A lot of people perished on that day, I was lucky to survive.

I worked in Kirovsk for two years, between 1955 and 1957, returned to Leningrad and started to look for a new job. I visited different organizations. They greeted me rather warmly, asked me to fill in a form, but having considered my application, informed me that they weren't able to take me. It wasn't easy to tell by my appearance, if I was a Jewess or not, but after I filled in the form, everything became clear. So I 'wandered about' for some time and later through some friends of mine found a job as a librarian at the Children's Literature Publishing House.

It was very interesting to work in that library, as there was this wonderful manager, who during the most fearful times of persecution preserved a selection of pre-revolutionary works by children's writer Lidiya Charskaya, a file of the children's magazine Chizh & Yozh (Siskin and Hedgehog), which was banned. [Editor's note: Lidiya Alekseyevna Charskaya (born Churilova) (1875- 1937): a Russian writer and actress of Aleksandrovskiy theater in St.Petersburg, wrote over 80 books, which made her very popular among young readers in the 1900s.

However, in 1912 her literary career was thwarted by a harsh critical article by poet Kornei Chukovskiy, who accused Charskaya of vulgarity and hypocrisy. Later she was also charged with monarchism and religiosity, and after that she was not published at all. She died in 1937 a natural death, completely forgotten.]

The manager was a person, who knew children's literature very well and loved her job devotedly. I learnt a lot, working there. Little by little, I made new friends. The Writers' House was situated near the Children's Publishing House, on 18 Voinova Street. I came to work there after some time.

I worked at the so-called 'mass department' at the Writers' House, I was engaged with the writers' 'education', arranged various meetings for them with famous figures of science and engineering, artists, producers, theater and cinema actors. I was very business-like and vigorous. Writers are very capricious and sometimes even quarrelsome people; often I caught it from them, besides, there was a lot of gossip. I called that organization the 'viper-house' but I passed through the hard school of life there. I left the place in 1982 after 15 years of work there.

- Marriage life

I met my husband, Lev Samuilovich Freidman, in 1957 at my friends' place in Kirovsk. Lev was a Jewish man. He was born in Leningrad in 1926. His father didn't have any higher education but he was a very good practical economist and was a member of a lot of expert commissions. Lev had twin sisters, both were doctors-pediatricians, they are still alive; and a brother, who died in 1999. Lev studied at the Leningrad Institute of Law, but he didn't manage to obtain a diploma, as he was arrested and exiled to Kirovsk.

Serving his time there, he got acquainted with the prosecutor of Kirovsk, his name was Finkelstein, and he had studied at the same institute in Leningrad, but they didn't know each other. I met Lev in the Finkelstein family, who I also got to know when in Kirovsk. I married Lev at the end of 1957.

After his sentence in Kirovsk Lev finished a construction equipment installation technical school, and all his life after that he was occupied with industrial construction at Krasny Vyborzhets plant, at Sredivlov machine-tool plant, at Izhorsky plant and others. He was well-known among constructors, respected and loved.

Regardless of the fact that he was a constructor, we weren't able to get an apartment, we were in line for a long time and finally we built a cooperative apartment. In 1968 we moved into a two-bedroom cooperative apartment on Varshavskaya Street, where I still live now.

In 1981 Lev was assigned by his ministry to the construction of Kostomuksha ore mining and processing combine in Karelia. The construction was executed jointly with the Finns. There were a lot of KGB [20](#) representatives. They were people dressed in civilian clothes in the guise of

interpreters, but they only disrupted the work, as they didn't know the specifics of construction work and technical terms. Lev was very soon bored with that and began to work directly with the Finns; they all understood the drawings perfectly and understood each other very well.

When Lev came back to Leningrad, he always said, 'The KGB is close at my heels, it doesn't allow me to breathe, besides, here you are being born in Paris...'

I visited him twice in Kostomuksha. It's a nice town, constructed by the Finns, very charming, clean and neat. The nature is wonderful there with beautiful lakes and marvelous places. But there is this iron anomaly and lack of oxygen in the air, the same as in Kirovsk, that's why I felt bad there, besides, this area was also contra-indicated to Lev because of his health. However, he worked throughout the term of his contract, returned to Leningrad at the end of 1982 and began to look for a new job, as his former position had already been occupied.

I started to work at the Monuments' Protection Society, located on Shpalernaya Street in 1982 and worked there until I retired in 1987. We arranged a City Experts' Club in that Society, where very interesting and intelligent people gathered; people of various occupations, who knew and loved their city.

They found some materials about the besieged crematorium, which had been located in Victory Park. They told me about it in a whisper because during Brezhnev's [21](#) era it wasn't allowed to mention it aloud.

There was a brick factory before World War II and during the siege of Leningrad the brick baking ovens were used as crematorium ovens, where dead bodies of citizens, who died in the siege, were burnt. What else could have been done? The city had to be saved, those who were alive had to be protected from infections. The information was kept secret, so that not only the enemies, but also our own people wouldn't know about it. By the way, when I didn't yet know anything about it, I once went with my husband to that park for a walk. We sat on a bench and I suddenly felt unwell, very uncomfortable and uneasy. Such a mystical thing!

Lev started working again in December 1982 and on 28th February 1983 an emergency occurred. I was at my parents' place in the evening, when the phone rang. Lev was speaking in a strange voice; I immediately understood that something terrible had happened. He was accused of receiving a bribe and arrested. He was very seriously struggling against hard drinking at work. The equipment was installed at a great height and Lev didn't want to face any accidents with human victims. He fired one of the drunkards and the latter wrote a complaint about him.

In order to use services of a crane- operator, who already got transferred to some other place, Lev wrote a receipt for a different person and was to give the money to that crane- operator. Many people did that, when people worked at different places, and such job combining was prohibited by legislation.

Lev was accused of accepting a bribe and was placed in the famous Leningrad Kresty prison. The amount of money in question was very small, and no one could understand such preventive punishment, but the investigator refused to alter it and release Lev 'under a written undertaking not to leave the place'.

My husband's muskrat hat was brought to me; it was all cut into pieces, the investigators were looking for something in it, as they explained to me. They searched my apartment on 8th March; they knocked on the walls, looking for hiding-places. They composed a statement, but there was nothing to make an inventory of.

Eight or nine investigators took turns on Lev's case, they had nothing to get hold of, but he remained in Kresty. I went to the prison along with his sisters; once every two months it was allowed to deliver a package. One had to, as Anna Akhmatova [22](#) wrote in her poems, stand in a very long line, face a 'hole' at the end of the line, where one could stick through his hand with a package, someone 'barked' something out of that hole and that was it.

Lev stayed in Kresty for half a year. We got him out of the prison with great difficulties. All witnesses in court were for the defense, the prosecution had none. Lev's colleagues found the anonymous man, who had written the letter, and beat him severely. These Russian guys actually helped me a lot.

But the court didn't withdraw the accusation and Lev was sentenced to work in 'chemistry', as it was called at that time. It was a hazardous production, he worked not far from Volosovo in Leningrad region at a wood-processing factory for one and a half years.

'Kresty' ruined his health. When he was released from prison, he had a green face and violet lips. His leg muscles were atrophied, he had to learn to walk again. The prison ward meant for four people contained 18 people, there was no air to breathe, no oxygen.

There were criminals and drug addicts among the prisoners. Lev didn't tell me about those details in order not to upset me. In Volosovo he had to register every day at the militia. He wasn't allowed to go to Leningrad on holidays, he was considered a social outcast, who should be in the city.

He was totally depressed and he couldn't get rid of it. Once we lost him on Victory Day [23](#) and found him later in a small village hospital with terrible pneumonia. Later, when he was in Kostyushko hospital in Leningrad, the doctors were very surprised at the absolute lack of resistibility, but when they found out about the prison, they didn't ask any more questions.

He returned at the end of 1984 and in August 1993 he died, having suffered three infarcts during that period of time. He was buried in the Preobrazhensky Jewish cemetery, not according to Jewish customs, but in a secular manner, without ceremonies. I visit the cemetery often, but I never go there on Saturday. I observe this Jewish custom.

I get packages and medicine in Hesed at lower prices. I have a lot of relatives who live both in Russia and abroad, in the USA, Israel, France and Germany. We keep in touch and call each other. Certainly, I'm very worried because of the acts of terrorism, which became more frequent recently.

When on 11th September the Trade Center Towers crashed down, we were very worried about all the Americans, but most of all we were alarmed about the fate of the grandchildren of Polina, my mother's sister, who study in prestigious schools, located not far from these Towers.

It wasn't possible to reach them via phone, and only through my cousin in Paris we found out that they were fine. And now this act of terrorism in Moscow. We didn't move away from our TV sets for days. Let alone Israel, where our relatives and friends live.

I had a positive attitude to their departure, I also wanted to leave together with my husband, but, as the only daughter, I couldn't leave my parents, especially when they were in their declining years and sick. Now that I'm a sick and elderly person myself I don't have any religious life, since it would be too difficult for me in terms of health. I lead a secular and a very modest life.

- **Glossary:**

1 Reds: Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

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 World War I, 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 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.

4 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40): The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannenheimer line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannenheimer line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

5 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.

6 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.

7 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union: Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

8 Struggle against religion: The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

9 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.

10 Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934): Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

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

12 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837): Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society

of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

13 War with Japan

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

14 Road of Life: It was a passage across Lake Ladoga in winter during the Blockade of Leningrad. It was due to the Road of Life that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

15 Kalinin, Mikhail (1875-1946): Soviet politician, one of the editors of the party newspaper Pravda, chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of the RSFSR (1919-1922), chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1922-1938), chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1938-1946). He was one of Stalin's closest political allies.

16 Peter the Great (1672-1725): Tsar of Russia from 1689-1725. Peter Europeanized Russia by imposing Western ideas and customs on his subjects. His interests were wide-ranging: among others, he founded the Russian navy, reorganized the army on the Western lines, bound the administration of the church to that of the state and reformed the Russian alphabet. His introduction of Western ways was the basis for the split between upper classes and peasants that was to plague Russian society until the Revolution of 1917.

17 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.

18 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'.

19 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.

20 KGB: The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

21 Brezhnev, Leonid, Ilyich (1906-82) Soviet leader. He joined the Communist Party in 1931 and rose steadily in its hierarchy, becoming a secretary of the party's central committee in 1952. In 1957, as protégé of Khrushchev, he became a member of the presidium (later politburo) of the central committee. He was chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, or titular head of state. Following Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, which Brezhnev helped to engineer, he was named first secretary of the Communist Party.

Although sharing power with Kosygin, Brezhnev emerged as the chief figure in Soviet politics. In 1968, in support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine,' asserting that the USSR could intervene in the domestic affairs of any Soviet bloc nation if communist rule was threatened. While maintaining a tight rein in Eastern Europe, he favored closer relations with the Western powers, and he helped bring about a détente with the United States. In 1977 he assumed the presidency of the USSR. Under Gorbachev, Brezhnev's regime was criticized for its corruption and failed economic policies.

22 Akhmatova, Anna (pen name of Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, 1888-1966): Russian poet, whose first book, *Evening* (1912), won her attention from Russian readers for its beautiful love lyrics. Akhmatova became a member of the Acmeist literary group in the same year and her second volume of poems, *Rosary* (1914) made her one of the most popular poetesses of her time. After 1922 it became difficult for her to publish as the Soviet government disapproved of her apolitical themes, love lyrics and religious motif. In 1946 she was the subject of harsh attacks by the Soviet cultural authorities once again, and she was only able to publish again under Khrushchev's regime.

23 Victory Day in Russia (9th May): National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.