

# Valeria Boguslavskaya

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Ukraine

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## My family background

My father came from the town of Khorol, Poltava province. His grandfather on his mother's side Zakhar Rogachevskiy owned a windmill in Khorol, he inherited it from his father. It was a big mill. My great-grandfather's family worked there as well as other employees, both Jewish and Ukrainian. My great-grandfather was a very respected man. He played an important role in the Jewish community of the town. There was a big synagogue in Khorol where Zakhar and his family had their seats of honor. He made significant contributions to the social fund. Zakhar was a very intelligent man.

My great-grandfather was a very religious man. He observed Sabbath, prayed every day and followed the kashrut. He knew Yiddish and Hebrew and could interpret the Torah and the Talmud. He also knew Ukrainian but couldn't speak a word of Russian. My great-grandfather was merry and stubborn, even quarrelsome and reckless at times. He was a very strong man and he used his physical strength sometimes to resolve disputable issues. There were legends about his physical strength. Once he told a visitor to get out of his house when they didn't succeed to agree on something. That visitor said that he wouldn't leave and grasped at the door frame. My great-grandfather carried him, along with the door-frame, out of his house. Zakhar also enjoyed the simple pleasures of life. He often visited Poltava with his friends, went to restaurants and taverns. They said he even had a lover. I don't have any information about Zakhar's wife, my great-grandmother. I know that she died long before the [Russian] Revolution of 1917 <sup>1</sup>. My great-grandfather Zakhar lived a long life. He died in Khorol in the middle of the 1930s.

Zakhar had many children. The oldest was my grandmother Zlata Rogachevskaya, born in 1879. I knew her sisters Genia and Ida. Ida never got married. She lived her life in Poltava. During the war she was in evacuation. She died in 1955. Genia was married. She lived with her husband in Khorol. She had two children. Her son Abram lives in Mirgorod and her daughter Sonia lives in Kharkov. Genia died in evacuation in 1943. My grandmother's youngest sister Enta, born in 1896, died incidentally. During an epidemic of influenza in 1910 she and my grandmother's older son fell ill. The shop assistant at the pharmacy was ignorant but nobody knew this. He gave the first



medication that was at hand and it turned out to be strychnine, a poison. Enta and my grandmother's son Moishe died. My grandmother also had brothers, but I don't know anything about them. They died before the Revolution. All the boys in the family studied at cheder. The girls studied at home. Their teachers were students or senior pupils from grammar school. My grandmother didn't receive any education, but she could read and write in Russian and Ukrainian that she learned herself. They spoke Yiddish in the family.

My grandfather on my father's side Lipa Boguslavskiy came from a poor family. His father was a ritual slaughterer at the synagogue in Khorol. Khorol was a mainly Jewish town. Jews constituted the major part of the population. Basically, the inhabitants of Khorol were craftsmen and farmers. All tailors and shoemakers in Khorol were Jews. Jews also ran small stores where they sold food products, clothing and shoes, etc. There were also Ukrainians in Khorol. There were no nationality conflicts. Ukrainians and Jews got along well. Jews and Ukrainians communicated in Yiddish and Ukrainian. Almost all Ukrainians in Khorol knew Yiddish.

There was a synagogue and a church in Khorol. My grandfather Lipa had to go to work when he was 14 because he had to provide for his mother and four younger sisters and brothers. My great-grandfather Zakhar Rogachevskiy helped their family. It was customary at that time that richer Jews helped the poor ones. Besides, he employed Lipa at his mill. Lipa felt at home in the family of Rogachevskiy. But when Zakhar found out that Lipa and his older daughter Zlata had fallen in love with one another Zakhar got very angry that his daughter wanted to marry a poor man. He didn't give his consent to their marriage. But Zlata, his favorite daughter, cried day and night until he gave in.

My grandmother Zlata and Lipa had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah, Jewish musicians, traditional food on the tables and lots of fun. There were guests of honor at the wedding: the mayor, the chief of police and the judge. Zakhar Rogachevskiy was on good terms with all of them regardless of their nationality. People of all nationalities - Ukrainian, Polish, Russian and Jewish - were on friendly terms with one another. This had a positive result during the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War [2](#). There were pogroms [3](#) during this period. Bandits robbed, raped, beat and murdered Jews, but none of them came to Khorol. There was a fighting squad that included Jews and young people of other nationalities and they didn't allow one single bandit to come to town.

After their wedding my grandfather and grandmother lived in Zakhar's house. Lipa worked at the mill and Zlata, who had a child every year, was a housewife. Lipa worked very hard to win Zakhar's approval, but Zakhar couldn't forgive his beloved daughter Zlata for marrying a poor man. Lipa died of a sarcoma in 1908. People said that he caught the disease while working on the rye field. Some rye diseases are contagious and can cause a sarcoma. I don't know whether that's really true. Perhaps, he inherited some poor disposition from his father, who had died when he was young. My grandmother Zlata, who hadn't turned 30 by then, dedicated herself to her children and home. Soon after Lipa died Zakhar's wife died, too, and Zlata became the housekeeper. They observed all Jewish traditions, followed the kashrut and celebrated Sabbath, Pesach, Purim, Chanukkah and Yom Kippur. Everything stayed as it was when my great-grandmother was still alive, although Zlata wasn't religious. At least later, when she was living with us, she never prayed or celebrated Jewish holidays. She was more interested in the course of events and people, but not Jewish traditions. My grandmother read a lot of books by Russian and foreign writers. I don't remember her reading Jewish books. During the war my grandmother was in evacuation with us in

Barnaul. She died in 1951.

My grandfather Lipa and grandmother Zlata had eight children: six boys and two girls. My grandmother told me that she had six boys and then came a girl. One girl didn't seem enough to them and they got another one. The boys studied at cheder and went to work at a young age. Their grandfather Zakhar thought it was necessary. Besides, the situation in the family got worse. Zakhar couldn't provide for his daughter's big family after Lipa died. The boys became apprentices at a big mill in Poltava.

My father's brother Gershl was the oldest child. He was born in 1897. Gershl was a humble man. He finished a course in accounting after the Revolution of 1917 and worked as an accountant for the rest of his life. Gershl married a Russian woman. Her name was Evgenia Medvedeva and she had a daughter. During the war Gershl was in evacuation and after the war he, his wife and their daughter Maya lived in Chernigov. Gershl died of cancer in 1970. His daughter Maya lives in Chernigov.

My father's second oldest brother Abram was born in 1898. He was the most talented and determined of the brothers. While being a worker at the mill he demonstrated his engineering skills without having any education. He modified some equipment functions and the owner of the mill noticed him. The owner helped Abram to get education and he took an external degree at grammar school. Abram received higher education after the Revolution. He worked at power stations and was involved in the electrification of railroads. He was an outstanding engineer and knew in person Kaganovich [4](#) and Ordjonikidze [Bolshevik Party leader and Lenin's comrade; high official in the Soviet government]. Before the war he worked in Kharkov and after the war he lectured at the tank college in Saratov. Abram wasn't married and didn't have any children. He returned to Kharkov after the war. He worked as an engineer until he died in 1972.

The next children were twins, Moishe and Meilah, born in 1899. Moishe was the one who died after he took poison instead of medicine. Meilah was a commander of an armored train during the Civil War and perished in 1919.

My father's youngest brother Iosif, born in 1902, didn't want to begin his life with hard manual labor. He became a shop-assistant in a store. After the Revolution he finished a course for tradesmen and worked as the director of a store for the rest of his life. During the war he was in evacuation in Tashkent with his family. His wife Polia died in evacuation and he got married twice or three times afterwards. He had two daughters: Fira and Liza. One of them married an Uzbek, and the other one was married to a Tatar man. Liza's older son has two names: Bencion, a Jewish name, and Bahadyr, an Uzbek name. They lived in Uzbekistan and he was accordingly given an Uzbek name. They lived in Tashkent. Iosif died there in 1975.

The next children were two daughters. The older girl's name was Esther Malka. She was born in 1903. Later Esther Malka became Esphir in Russian manner [see common name] [5](#). She wanted to become a doctor and her older brother Abram helped her to get education at the Medical Institute in Kharkov. All her brothers, including my father, provided assistance to Esther. Esther worked as a doctor all her life. She died in 1993, three days before she turned 90. Her husband Naum Libin perished at the front in 1942, and her daughter Mary Libina lives in Kiev. She is an art expert and a great specialist on the life and work of Mark Chagall [6](#).

My father's youngest sister Klara didn't get any education. She was a very beautiful girl and emotional person. She got married several times. Her first husband was my father's friend Mark Tarnopolskiy. In the middle of the 1930s she married a very interesting man, a construction engineer called Leonid Bely. Bely was arrested in 1938 [during the so-called Great Terror] [7](#), but they didn't keep him long in the camp [see Gulag] [8](#). He was a very skilled construction organizer and was sent to a construction site in Mongolia. He was supervised there and didn't have the right to leave the place until 1942. Klara joined him there during the war. In the 1940s her son from her first marriage, Yuriy, vanished and my aunt actually lost her mind. She was cradling the pillow in her arms calling it Yuriy. The doctors advised her to have another baby and she gave birth to a girl when she was over 40. They called the girl Yulia after Yuriy. She lives in Moscow. In 1947 Leonid Bely was allowed to return to Russia, but he wasn't allowed to settle down in Moscow, Leningrad or capitals of the union republics. He worked in Briansk for three years and then he obtained a [residence] permit [9](#) and moved to Moscow with his family. Klara and her husband died in the middle of the 1980s.

My father Boris Boguslavskiy was born in Khorol on 5th May 1900. He was given the name Bencion at birth. But when he was in the Red army during the revolution his commanding officer suggested that he should change his name to Boris. He said people would be teasing him, calling him Benia otherwise. Thus, he became Boris. Like all other boys my father finished cheder and went to work at the age of ten. He worked as an errand boy at the drapery store from 1910 till 1914. In 1914 he went to work at the mill in Poltava where his brothers were working, too. He was an equipment greaser.

This was a good time for the brothers. They worked and played together. They were meeting with their friends and girls. To make sure they wouldn't disturb their mother and grandfather at night they decided one of them had to stay at home. They tied a rope to his leg and threw another end of the rope into the garden through the window. The rest of them were coming home at different times and they just had to pull the rope and their brother opened the door for them. Abram worked and studied during the day and didn't want to be bothered at night. He was smart and resourceful, so he tied the rope to the bed and his brothers had to get back in through the window.

The brothers were very close and loved each other. Although they grew up in a religious family that honored Jewish traditions they were atheists. They were enthusiastic about the Revolution and the new ideas. My father quit the mill in 1917 and joined the Red Guard unit. In 1918 he became a member of the Communist International of young people. A year later my father became the secretary of the provincial Komsomol [10](#) committee and then instructor and political education department supervisor of the Komsomol committee in Kharkov, which was the capital of Ukraine at that time. In 1925 he became a member of the Bolshevik Party.

The only elementary education my father had was cheder. He learned to read and write in Russian and then he finished a Rabfak [11](#) and a course of 'red directors'[political education for people holding managerial positions]. My father was an intelligent man. He read a lot, knew the [then] modern poets Mayakovsky [12](#), Yesenin [13](#) and Blok [14](#) and he wrote poems himself. Women liked him and he had the reputation of being a 'playboy' before he met my mother in 1925 and fell in love. On a photograph of my mother, father and his ex- girlfriend he wrote the words addressed to my mother, 'I used to think that sentimentality was just spree, but here - a little spring has broken in my chest'. My parents got married in 1926 never to part again.

I know very little about my mother's family. I have an old picture of my mother's family. There is a whole group of people, but they are all strangers to me, regretfully. My mother Anna Gandelsman was born into the family of a poor Jewish fiddler in the town of Priluki, Chernigov province, in 1902. Her father Boruh Gandelsman, born in the 1860s, performed at Jewish weddings and parties. His family didn't have a stable income and they were very poor. My grandfather also tried to teach children to play the fiddle, but there were very few parents that could afford to pay for classes and this work didn't produce any profit.

My grandmother Hana Gandelsman, nee Zbarskaya, didn't work. My grandparents lived with the family of my grandmother's parents Isaak and Rohlia Zbarskiye. I don't know what my grandfather Isaak was doing. I only know that he had many children that got various professions: wagon driver [balagula], melamed and teacher at cheder. They were rather poor. My grandfather Boruh died in his late forties. My grandmothers both became widows when they were very young. Hana lived a long life. She was a selfish woman and very different from the image of a typical Jewish mother. There was no warmth or motherly love in the house and her children left their parents' home as soon as they could. I don't know if they were religious or not.

The older son Moisey, born in 1890, left his family when he was young. He finished grammar school as an external student. He worked as an accountant and his wife worked as a doctor in Kharkov. They didn't have any children. Moisey died around 1935.

The second son Yasha, born in the 1900s, became an engineer. He was married. His wife's name was Maria. He worked at the military plant. During the war the plant was evacuated to the Ural. He died of ulcer in 1943.

My mother's youngest brother Lyova, born in 1903, was also an engineer. He worked at Kharkov tractor plant. When the war began he wanted to go to the front but because of an accident at the plant he had two toes amputated and wasn't allowed to join the army. With his plant he evacuated to Stalingrad and then Barnaul where he took part in the construction of the Barnaul tank plant. My grandmother Hana lived with Lyova. She was a terribly selfish woman and didn't allow him to get married. She believed he should take care of her. At the age of 80 she broke her hip and couldn't move. Lyova spent his life looking after her. He got married at 45 after my grandmother died. He didn't have any children. Lyova died in Kharkov in 1980.

My mother's youngest sister Mania received no education. After the Revolution she finished a Rabfak to learn how to read and write. Mania never worked, as she was very sickly. Her Jewish husband Grisha Tsodikov, a wonderful man, simply adored her and didn't allow her to do anything, not even about the house. During the war Grisha perished at the front. Mania died in 1947. Their son Arkadiy Tsodikov lives in St. Petersburg.

My mother went to live with her cousins. There were four sisters, their last name was Tsyfrinovich and my mother was raised by them after her father died. They were her mother's cousins. My grandmother Hana sent my mother to be raised by her cousins because she understood that educated and modern women living in St. Petersburg would be able to give her daughter a lot more than she could.

I only know the name of the oldest of the Tsyfrinovich sisters. Her name was Tsyva. They were students and they were so emancipated that they didn't want to get married. Only Tsyva, who



became a doctor, was married. Her daughter Martha Tsyfrinovich was a puppeteer at the puppet theater. The rest of the sisters stayed single. They spoke Russian and wanted to forget the language of their parents - Yiddish. They read Russian books and communicated with young poets, artists and revolutionaries.

My mother grew up a modern emancipated young lady under their influence. She couldn't even speak Yiddish and when my father introduced her to his parents they couldn't communicate because they didn't speak Russian. My mother finished grammar school in St. Petersburg and after the Revolution she and her aunts moved to Kharkov. In Kharkov my mother entered a course in law. She never worked as a lawyer but she was a very educated woman. In 1925 my mother met my father and they got married in April 1926. They had a civil ceremony, which was common at that time. They didn't have a Jewish wedding although my grandfather Zakhar insisted that they did. They rented an apartment at the beginning until my father, who held an important position at the Ukrteztile trust, received an apartment.

My older sister Nelia Boguslavskaya was born in 1927. My grandmother Zlata came to look after Nelia and my parents hired a nanny. My father had a high salary and my mother could afford to stay at home.

In summer 1928 my father went to Kharkov region as a collectivization [15](#) officer. He fell ill with typhoid there and was brought to Kharkov unconscious. My grandmother Zlata contracted typhoid from him. It took a lot of effort to nurse them back to health. It took my father a long time to recover from what he saw in the villages - the forced removal of bread from farmers, the expropriation of kulak [16](#) property and the deportation of those that opposed the authorities to Siberia. It was awful for him to have to participate in these processes. He had to because he was a member of the party and believed what the party was doing to be right. Later my father held a number of official posts. My parents lived in a small apartment. They often had family and friend gatherings to celebrate 1st May and October Revolution Day [17](#). They went on picnics to the countryside. All of their friends were Jews but they never talked about Jewish traditions or holidays and they tried to destroy any Jewish roots that they had.

My father Boris Boguslavskiy, after recovering from typhoid, was the director of a factory that processed raw materials for the manufacturing of felt, wool and other fabrics. The factory was located in a neighborhood of Kharkov called Bavaria for some reason. The collective of employees of the factory corresponded with German communists that even visited Kharkov. My father had a picture taken of him and Wilhelm Pieck [18](#). This was before 1933 when the fascists came to power in Germany. Around 1936 my father finished a special course for political officers of the Red army and was waiting for a job assignment as a commissar of a division in the Far East. There was a delay.

In 1937 arrest of the leading party activists began and the authorities suspected every person to be an 'enemy of the people' [19](#). My father was expelled from the party and demoted. My mother destroyed all photographs including those where my father was photographed with German communists. The most difficult thing for my father was that he was expelled from the party because his faith and ideals were destroyed. He never spoke about this period of his life to my sister or me. After the denunciation of the cult of Stalin in the 1950s [at the Twentieth Party Congress] [20](#), when we lived in Kherson, my father met an acquaintance that asked him whether

he had restored his party membership. My father went pale and said nothing to her. He didn't submit a request to be restored in the party. Perhaps, he was afraid that they would turn him down. My mother thought that it was good luck that my father didn't go to the Far East to work as a commissar. He wouldn't have survived this period of repression.

## Growing up in wartime

I was born in 1939 and my mother went to work. My grandmother Zlata was looking after me. I have dim memories of high ceilings in our apartment in Kharkov, my little bed and a blue blanket. That's all I remember from that period.

When the war began [the so-called Great Patriotic War] [21](#) nobody thought of evacuation at first. It was a common hope that it would be over in no time. But then Kiev was occupied and there were rumors about the extermination of Jews on the occupied areas and it became clear that it was necessary to evacuate.

My mother's younger brother Lyova, who lived in Kharkov with my grandmother Hana and was going to evacuate along with the tractor plant, said that he could only take my grandmother, my mother and my older sister with him as members of his family. My father's sister Esther-Malka was mobilized to the army in the first days of the war. She was staying near Kharkov where a hospital train was being formed and she decided to take me and my grandmother Zlata with her. She believed that at least we would have food on the train. My father was in the air-defense troops. His unit was retreating from Kharkov to Stalingrad. My mother decided that it would be better for me and my grandmother Zlata to join Esther-Malka. It happened so that we separated at the very beginning of the war: my father was on the way to Stalingrad, my mother and Nelia evacuated with Lyova and my grandmother Zlata and I joined the hospital train.

I remember little of this period. I was very ill. I had abscesses all over my body, then I fell ill with measles and then scarlet fever. Esther-Malka kept me in her compartment. It was a risk because she wasn't allowed to keep anybody with an infectious disease on the sanitary train. She confessed to the chief of the train about me and he allowed her to stay with me at Kalinovka station in Kuibyshev region. My grandmother wouldn't have been able to cope with this task alone.

My mother and Nelia went to Stalingrad with the tractor plant. My father came there, too, with his unit and decided to look for them. He knew that the plant employees lived in Beketovka and decided that he should be able to find my mother at the market. He went to the market in Beketovka. As he was short he climbed on a stand and saw my mother and Nelia at the market. My parents didn't have any information about Esther-Malka. They thought they had lost me and my grandmother. My father reproached my mother for the first time in his life for making the mistake of letting us go with Esther. Later they sent a letter to the chief of the hospital and he told them where we were. This was in summer 1942 when the Germans were already attacking Stalingrad. My father moved on with the plant and my mother and Nelia came to Kalinovka. I recognized Nelia at once, but my mother... I said, 'My mother was young and beautiful, but this is an old ugly thin woman'. My mother was crying and I was crying, too. I didn't want to leave Esther-Malka. I called her 'interim mother'. So, our reunion wasn't very happy.

The front was moving closer and we went to my father. His plant settled down in Barnaul. I don't remember our trip to Barnaul. We arrived at the railroad workers club where all evacuated families

were staying. We slept on the floor. Some people had blankets and some used their own clothes to keep warm at night. Then we moved into the house that formerly belonged to a Povolzhye German family. When the war began many Germans were deported to Siberia from Povolzhye. They stayed in Barnaul and then they were moved to the country, away from big military enterprises. Our family occupied half the house and there was another evacuated family in the other half of the house.

My father and mother walked to work across town every day in any kind of weather. They were working at the construction of a big tank plant on the outskirts of town. My grandmother woke them up at 3 o'clock in the morning. My mother worked at the headquarters of the plant and my father worked as a chief energy specialist. Nelia passed her exams for the 8th grade and went to the 9th grade.

As a result of scarlet fever, I had complications in my joints and couldn't walk for a long time. Later I went to kindergarten, but children got very little food there. I remember our teachers and nurses having full plates of food while we received just a little bit. We were always hungry. My sister picked me up after she got bread by cards and I asked her to give me a piece of bread because I wasn't in the condition to walk home. She had to pull me behind her as I couldn't walk properly. After we received a room from the plant I was sent to the kindergarten of the plant. The children got plenty of food there. I guess military enterprises had special supplies. It was a very good kindergarten. We even went to the countryside in summer. Once I came home from kindergarten and asked my mother, 'Who are Jews? Are we worse than the others?' She replied, 'No, we are just like anybody else. There are Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews. You are a Jew and so am I'. This was the first time I questioned my nationality. In 1946 my whole kindergarten group went to the first grade of a Russian school.

I remember our Polish neighbor Stanislava dancing, singing, crying and laughing when Warsaw was liberated. The reaction was kind of the same on Victory Day [22](#), 9th May 1945. We cried, sang and danced.

## Post-war

My parents continued to work in Barnaul and my sister and I attended school. In 1947 Nelia went to Kiev, where Esther lived, and entered Kiev Polytechnic Institute. A year later I fell ill with typhoid and inflammation of pelvis of the kidneys. It resulted in anemia and I actually couldn't walk and often fainted. The doctors said that to save my life we had to return to Ukraine where I was born. My parents wanted to go to Kiev or Kharkov. My father went to Moscow to obtain a permit, and he was offered a job with the Komsomolets plant in Lubny. We went there.

I faced anti-Semitism in Lubny. I went to the Russian school, located far from home, because I didn't know Ukrainian. When I was passing the Ukrainian school in the darkness the boys were shouting, 'Ah, Sarah!' [this Jewish name was used to abuse] beating me on the head with their school-bags. I told them that they were violating the constitution and that all people were equal in our country. Later my mother organized a group of the most incorrigible 'hooligans' that studied in our school and they escorted me home. I recited poems to them and told them of books that I had read.

My father was a dispatcher at the plant. When he decided to submit his request about restoration of his membership in the party an anti- Semitic campaign began: the Doctors' Plot [23](#). My father



was fired. Esther was working at the polyclinic at the Higher Party School [24](#). She lost her job, too. My father couldn't find work for a long time and we had to leave for Kherson. Nelia received her [mandatory] job assignment [25](#) there upon graduation from the institute.

In Kherson my mother got a job first and then my father found work at the department of culture. He was an economist there until he retired. In Lubny we lived in an apartment of the plant and we had to move out after my father was fired. In Kherson we rented a small room in a house without any comforts.

When we heard about Stalin's death I was on the edge of crying but my father told me fiercely, 'Shut up! Stop it!' We had his portrait with the mourning bands installed at school and we were reading the poem 'Vladimir Ilyich Lenin' by Mayakovsky in class. When it was my turn to read I had a lump in my throat and couldn't say a word.

After finishing school I entered Kiev Polytechnic Institute. I finished school with a gold medal and I only had to pass an interview. I was very nervous. Perhaps, it was the result of malaria, which I had during the war. During the interview I didn't feel well and they called a doctor. It turned out I had a very low blood pressure. The teachers told me that I couldn't study at the institute with such a low blood pressure. I said through tears, 'Of course, I can only go work at a plant or collective farm [26](#) with my blood pressure'. They sent me to take exams and I got a '3' for composition, although I always wrote excellent compositions. It was clearly a demonstration of anti-Semitism. I realized that I had to go to an institute where I wouldn't care and wouldn't get excited. I entered Odessa Technological Institute. I studied successfully. There were many Jewish students and teachers and I actually faced no anti-Semitism there. Once my close friend told me that she had broken up with her young man because he was a Jew. Although I was a Jew she still confessed in me.

I could choose the location of my job assignment because I had the highest grades. My parents found out there was a position in Kharkov, although with a very low salary. They convinced me to go there and promised that they would join me. I went to Kharkov and lived there until 1975 when I exchanged my apartment for one in Kiev.

My parents stayed in Kherson. My sister Nelia married Evsey Berman, a Jew, in 1955. Nelia died of cancer in 1980. My father died in 1982. He was devoted to the Communist Party until the last days of his life. My mother moved in with me. She died in Kiev in 1985.

I'm an engineer. A long time ago I began to write poems. At school I translated from Ukrainian into Russian and sometimes from English into Russian. The first poetess that I translated into Ukrainian was Veronika Tushnova. Later I got fond of Marina Tsvetaeva [27](#). My first book of poems was published in 1965. The publishing house kept my manuscript for a long time until an acquaintance of mine called them and, introducing herself as a high official, told them to publish my book. She did it as a joke but it worked and my first book of poems was published. Then I couldn't publish a line until the middle of the 1990s. They just didn't publish any Jewish writers at all at the time. All publishing houses were state owned and there was a tough censorship. It was impossible to publish a single line.

I write poems in Ukrainian. In Kherson I had wonderful Ukrainian teachers and I learned the language to perfection. I love this language and I believe it to be my mother tongue. I don't know Yiddish. When my grandmother was alive I asked her to teach me Yiddish. She said, 'You won't

need it'. A few years ago I entered an evening school to study Yiddish. Now I have a good conduct of Yiddish and translate Jewish poets. Recently a book of my poems and translations was published: they are translations of poems by Peretz Markish [28](#) and others.

My interest in the Jewish language and traditions is based on literature. I don't observe Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. I don't even know them. Israel is just another country for me. I do sympathize with its people but I simply don't agree with many things happening there. I don't think that one should respond to murder and terrorism with similar methods. I love Ukraine and, frankly speaking, I don't know who I am: a Jewish Ukrainian or a Ukrainian Jew.

I got married late. My husband Stanislav Rossoha is Ukrainian. He was born in Globino, Poltava region in 1943. He finished the Philological Faculty of Dnepropetrovsk University. We met a long time ago in Kharkov. Stanislav was a Ukrainian nationalist, he dedicated his life to the struggle for an independent Ukraine. He had many friends among the dissidents. During the period of the struggle against dissidents in the 1970s he could have been arrested. An acquaintance of ours hid him in a mental hospital for some time.

I don't know why I couldn't publish my poems in all those years; whether it was vulgar anti-Semitism or whether it had to do with my relationship with Stanislav. It happened so that Stanislav married another woman after I moved to Kiev. But the years passed and he is my husband now. I'm on good terms with his daughters from his first marriage. I don't have any children of my own. It's amazing, but his younger daughter looks very much like me. My husband says it is because he has always thought about me. I write and translate a lot nowadays. The Kiev Institute of Judaism supports my activities. So I get involved in the Jewish life and come back to my roots one way or another. I read Jewish newspapers and study at the University of Spiritual Heritage of the Jewish people. We celebrate Sabbath in the community. I have many friends there. I try to remember to light Sabbath candles and we celebrate Jewish holidays at home.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during 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.

### **[2](#) 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.

### **3 Pogroms in Ukraine**

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

### **4 Kaganovich, Lazar (1893-1991)**

Soviet Communist leader. A Jewish shoemaker and labor organizer, he joined the Communist Party in 1911. He rose quickly through the party ranks and by 1930 he had become Moscow party secretary-general and a member of the Politburo. He was an influential proponent of forced collectivization and played a role in the purges of 1936-38. He was known for his ruthless and merciless personality. He became commissar for transportation (1935) and after the purges was responsible for heavy industrial policy in the Soviet Union. In 1957, he joined in an unsuccessful attempt to oust Khrushchev and was stripped of all his posts.

### **5 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

### **6 Chagall, Marc (1889-1985)**

Russian-born French painter. Since Marc Chagall survived two world wars and the Revolution of 1917 he increasingly introduced social and religious elements into his art.

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

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

ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **8 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

## **9 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

## **10 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.

## **11 Rabfak (Rabochiy Fakultet - Workers' Faculty in Russian)**

Established by the Soviet power usually at colleges or universities, these were educational institutions for young people without secondary education. Many of them worked beside studying. Graduates of Rabfaks had an opportunity to enter university without exams.

## **12 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)**

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

### **13 Yesenin, Sergei Aleksandrovich (1895-1925)**

Russian poet, born and raised in a peasant family. In 1916 he published his first collection of verse, *Radunitsa*, which is distinguished by its imagery of peasant Russia, its religiosity, descriptions of nature, folkloric motifs and language. He believed that the Revolution of 1917 would provide for a peasant revival. However, his belief that events in post-revolutionary Russia were leading to the destruction of the country led him to drink and he committed suicide at the age of 30. Yesenin remains one of the most popular Russian poets, celebrated for his descriptions of the Russian countryside and peasant life.

### **14 Blok, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich (1880-1921)**

Russian poet, considered the greatest of the Russian Symbolists. Blok's reputation is based on a large number of lyrics, verse dramas and, above all, his masterpiece, the long poem *The Twelve*, an impressionistic picture of St. Petersburg during the early days of the Revolution. He is also recognized for creating the new accentual verse in Russian known as *dolniki*, which is based only on the number of stresses per line, thus allowing any number of unstressed syllables between the stresses. This introduced a new freedom into modern Russian poetry which was used to good account by later poets such as Mayakovsky and Yesenin.

### **15 Collectivization in the USSR**

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

### **16 Kulaks**

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

### **17 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.

### **18 Pieck, Wilhelm (1876-1960)**

First President of the German Democratic Republic (1949).

### **19 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

## **20 Twentieth Party Congress**

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

## **21 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.

## **22 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.

## **23 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.

## **24 Party Schools**

They were established after the Revolution of 1917, in different levels, with the purpose of training communist cadres and activists. Subjects such as 'scientific socialism' (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy) and 'political economics' besides various other political disciplines were taught there.

## **25 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.

## **26 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted



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

### **27 Tsvetaeva, Marina Ivanovna (1892-1941)**

Russian poet, playwright and prose writer. She began to write poetry at the age of 6 and started publishing books of poetry from the age of 16. Her first collection of poems, Evening Album (1910), shows a certain childlike frankness. Tsvetayeva was influenced by the Symbolists but did not join any literary group or movement.. She did not accept the Revolution of 1917 and went abroad in 1922 to join her husband. They lived in Berlin and Prague and finally settled in Paris in 1925. After years of financial difficulties she returned to the USSR in 1939. Her husband, daughter and sister were arrested, and Tsvetaeva could not withstand the isolation during evacuation in the war and hanged herself.

### **28 Markish, Peretz (1895-1952)**

Yiddish writer and poet, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.