

# Tatiana Nemizanskaya

Tatiana Isaacovna Nemizanskaya

St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Lyudmila Lyuban

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Tatiana Isaacovna Nemizanskaya is a slim woman of average height.

She is very active in spite of her age (78); she is very much interested in political events in this country and abroad, especially in Israel.

She reads a lot, has a perfect memory and remembers the names of her schoolteachers, who taught her 60 years ago.

Her speech is very clear and correct, however, speaking in front of a tape-recorder,

she gets very nervous and turns around a lot.

She lives together with her cousin's daughter.

She is energetic and goes to pick up the Hesed [1](#) packages herself.



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## Childhood and family

I, Tatiana Isaacovna Nemizanskaya, nee Svoiskaya, was born in the town of Nevel in Pskov province in 1924. My paternal grandparents died before the Revolution [2](#), long before I was born and I know very little of them. They lived in the village of Lobino close to Nevel. There were a lot of Jews in that village with the name of Svoisky.

My grandfather's name was Borukh, he was a farmer like everyone else in the village. My grandmother's name was Sterna and her name is translated into Russian as 'Tatiana' [3](#). I was given this name in honor of my paternal grandmother. Grandma kept the household and raised the children. They had five children: my father Isaac, another son called Mendel and three daughters: Golda, Ida and Tsilya. Nothing remained about them in my memory.

My maternal grandparents came from Nevel and lived there all their lives. Grandpa Iosif Gendel – Jewish name Ysef Leisar – was born in 1866. He finished cheder and was a religious and educated man. He prayed a lot, attended the synagogue regularly and observed all Jewish traditions. Mom told me that he always wore tallit and tefillin when he prayed. He also wore a kippah, he had a beard and moustache and he wore a frock coat during holidays. Mom also told me that Grandpa was a very wise man.

His job was not common: he gold-painted Russian Orthodox churches. He also had a business of his own. Such gold-painting experts' teams were not only involved in gold-painting Russian Orthodox churches and icon frames, but also worked in rich people's households. A Jewish gold-painter was considered a craftsman; he was hired for fulfilling private orders: gold-painting candlesticks, mirror frames and other expensive household goods in rich homes. When such a gold-painting craftsmen team was hired for the restoration of the Nevel convent, the craftsmen received an order to gold-paint the domes of the convent Cathedral. Fulfillment of the order required a lot of time – several years – since gold painting is a very thorough and laborious operation.

Grandpa died very early, he was a little bit older than 50. He died in his sleep. Mother told me that she had tried to wake him up but he was dead already. It must have been a heart attack. It happened in the 1920s. I have never seen him in my life.

I remember my maternal grandma very well. Her name was Rakhil – Jewish name Rokhl Leya – Gendeleva, nee Tseitlina. She was born in Nevel in 1871 and never left the town. She was as religious as my grandpa, she prayed a lot, attended the synagogue often, kept kosher, observed Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. As children we very often visited her on holidays and thus felt ourselves part of the Jewish community. Grandma also treated us to very delicious Jewish meals.

Grandma's mother tongue was Yiddish, she spoke this language to all adults. She spoke Russian to us, the children. We knew Yiddish, however, we could not speak it very well, but we could understand everything perfectly. Grandma didn't wear a wig, but always covered her hair with a headscarf. She wore a black lace shawl on holidays. She was a very beautiful woman, but her clothes were always very modest.

Grandma lived in a house of her own with three rooms and a large hall. The house had extensions and there was a shed and a vegetable garden near the house. Grandma kept a cow and was busy with the household. Peasants from neighboring villages, her acquaintances who knew her for many years, visited her and stayed in the house. She prepared dinner for them, cooked fish, since Nevel was a 'fish town.'

Nevel is located in a beautiful place. There is a big lake in the middle of the town, where young people spent a lot of time in summer, swam in the lake and went boating. A forest with a lot of mushrooms and berries surrounds the town, there are a lot of lakes; it is an area rich in lakes and fish. There were a lot of gardens in the town and a wonderful town park with brass band performances and dancing during the weekend.

Nevel, the 'fish town,' supplied all surrounding regions and almost all Russian cities with fish. There was a lot of fish in Nevel's numerous lakes. Merchants arranged deliveries and sales of fish as well as exchange of fish for other goods. Up to ten people or even more visited my grandmother at times. This was her occupation – she had her own business, as they call it now. She had a

housemaid, a Russian woman, who did all the housework during Sabbath and on Jewish holidays.

My grandparents had four children: Chaim [1888-1943], my mother Sofia [1893-1976], Isaih [1897-1951] and Mendel [1902-1973]. When Grandpa died all children were grownups.

I remember only Grandma's sister Tseita, who lived in Nevel, she died before the war [4](#). Grandma was 70 years old before the war. Though she stooped a little bit, she remained very active and lively.

The town of Nevel, where our family lived, was small; it had a population of approximately 20 thousand people. It was located on the border with Belarus. Nevel was an international town before the war. People of various nationalities lived close to each other: Russians, Jews, Belarusians and Poles. People lived in friendship and helped each other.

There were a lot of Jews in the town. One could hear Yiddish everywhere – in the street, in the marketplace, in stores. There was a single-floor, white-stone synagogue in the town and a Jewish school, which my brother attended. There was certainly a Jewish community, however, in the 1930s only Orthodox Jews attended it openly – mostly old people. Young Jews became public figures, activists and stepped aside from religion. They did not observe Jewish traditions, since the Soviet regime did not welcome it and propagated atheism [5](#). Right before the war both the synagogue and the Jewish school were closed.

There were a bristle factory, a canned food plant and a milk factory in town. A large number of citizens worked at these enterprises, including the Jewish population. Houses were mostly wooden and one-story. There were several two-story brick buildings only in the center of the town. Electricity was introduced in Nevel only before the war, everybody used oil lamps. There was no water supply system; we had to get water from the well. There were no cars either and we rode horses both in winter and in summer.

All food products were bought at the marketplace, nothing could be purchased in stores at those times. The marketplace was big, food products and hay were sold there; hay was delivered on carts. Kosher food and meat were sold at this market. There was also a Torgsin store in town [6](#). I remember quite clearly how we exchanged a silver cigarette-case for walnuts.

There was an amateur Jewish Theater, where plays of Jewish and other writers were staged. Actors from other cities came to our town and very often they were Jewish actors, who performed classical plays, translated into Yiddish. A visit of our famous compatriot, pianist Maria Veniaminovna Yudina [1899-1970], created a real furor. We never missed a performance or concert, trying to be closer to the Jewish culture. This was how Nevel was like during my childhood.

My father, Isaac Borisovich Svoisky, was born in Lobino in Pskov province in 1888. He finished cheder and his mother tongue was Yiddish. He worked as a carpenter in a carpenter's shop. He was a very handsome man. Later he moved to Nevel alone and met his wife to be, my mother, there.

During World War I my father served as a soldier in the Tsar's Army. However, after he was wounded he managed to return to Nevel and in 1915 he married my mother. The wedding was with a chuppah, according to Jewish tradition, as my mother told me. But it was done mostly under the influence of my mom and her parents, who were very religious. Father, as I recall, was not religious, really. I don't remember him praying.

My mother, Sofia Iosifovna Svoiskaya, nee Gendeleva, was born in 1893 in Nevel. She was raised in a religious family that observed all Jewish traditions. She finished four grades of a Jewish school; her mother tongue was Yiddish. However, she spoke Russian with us children. When my brother Boris [1916-1941] was born, he was circumcised. Then three daughters were born: Rosa [1919-1943], Tatiana [1924, the interviewee] and Minna [1926-1943] – everyone in the family called her Minya.

Most of the time my mother worked in day nurseries. Besides, she was a public activist and was elected delegate of the City Soviet [City Council of Working Class Delegates – local executive authority body], where she worked in the women department, responsible for solving women and children's problems. Public activists were prohibited from going to the synagogue, but Mother sometimes attended it secretly, so that no one would find out. She also took us with her, when we were small. We celebrated only Soviet holidays at home: 7th November [7](#), 1st May. We visited our grandma on Jewish holidays.

We lived separately from Grandma; we had a three-room apartment in a two-story brick building in the center of the town. There was a Russian stove [8](#) in the kitchen, three stairs led to a big room, which was called 'the hall' and there were two other smaller rooms. We had stove heating. The rooms were furnished very well. We had a grand piano, a huge wall-size mirror in a bronze frame, a card-table, arm-chairs and a big table covered with a beautiful Japanese table-cloth. There were statuettes everywhere, the beds were covered with bedspreads and covers, beautifully embroidered by nuns – there was a convent in town where one could buy all these goods. Pictures and a big tapestry depicting a landscape hung on the walls.

Five more Jewish families lived in our house. We got on well with them. Mom was a tall, slender woman, she was very energetic and active. She could do any work and was a perfect housewife. Everybody loved her. Right before the war she started to work as a matron at the Nevel Municipal Hospital.

My childhood passed in a very warm and benevolent atmosphere. First I attended a kindergarten, then I went to school. The kindergarten was a Jewish-Russian one. The school was turned into a Russian school by that time and was called First General Education School [9](#).

We all studied well at school, both my sisters and me. We were excellent pupils. Our praise letters were pinned to the walls at home. I loved literature and read books most of my free time. I also loved amateur art activities, especially singing.

We had very good teachers. The amateur singing club was directed by a wonderful woman, Yevgeniya Yevgeniyevna Yuryevskaya, a representative of an ancient noble family. She also worked as a regular teacher of music at school. Other teachers were also brilliant specialists. A lot of teachers were Jews. There was no anti-Semitism either at school or in Nevel at all. I finished school right before the war; I was hardly 17 years old at that time. My closest friends were three Jewish girls: Tanya Romanovskaya, Veta Khanina and Rosa Shulkina.

I went to Leningrad for school holidays, first to visit Mom's brother Isaih and later to my elder sister Rosa, who studied at an institute there. I remember how we went to the theater with her to watch the 'Uriel Acosta' performance. I liked the performance very much. The theater was situated on the Petrogradsky Side in the Cooperation House.

My brother Boris was eight years older than myself. He finished seven grades of the Nevel Jewish school and left for Leningrad to continue his studies. He graduated from the Refrigeration Technical School, came back to Nevel and studied by correspondence at the Leningrad Refrigeration Institute. He served for a fixed period in the Soviet army in the Far East in the city of Blagoveschensk. He was demobilized right before the war and continued to work and study.

My elder sister Rosa finished Nevel high school with honors and entered the Leningrad Institute of Foreign Languages. She lived in the institute dormitory not far from Smolny. In summer 1941 she passed the exams for the fourth year of study ahead of schedule and came to Nevel. My younger sister Minya finished the eighth grade at school by that time. She was 15 years old.

### **During the war**

On 22nd June 1941 our whole family was gathered together. We were happily making plans. Rosa was trying on new shoes. Suddenly we heard on the radio that the war had started. The next day Boris left for the front as a volunteer.

Soon the town was flooded with refugees from Belarus, Poland and Lithuania. They told us that Jews would better escape. Some Jews evacuated, others stayed. My grandma Rakhil was very stubborn and told us flatly that she was not going anywhere. Father supported her. Mother could not get leave from the hospital. However, she understood that it was absolutely necessary to flee so she continued to persuade everybody. Finally we got our belongings loaded onto a cart and tried to leave the city. However, we were forced to go back home because of combats all around Nevel.

On 15th July the Germans entered the town. At first they did not touch the Jews, though we did leave our house and lived in a hut on the outskirts. There was a military camp not far from us. The Germans drove prisoners of war to that camp. Suddenly Mother found out that our Boris was among those prisoners. She rushed to the camp and miraculously managed to bring him home. Boris was taken prisoner near Polotsk town. No one gave him away in prison – no one told the Germans that he was a Jew. Boris told us that when they were delivered to Nevel, he hoped that we had already managed to escape.

On 3rd August Germans drove all Jews together, around 800 people, to the ghetto. Our family was among the prisoners. Old people were placed near the former 'Blue Summer House' estate, all the rest were located in old shabby buildings behind the 'humpbacked bridge.' Together with us in a room of 25 meters another three families lived and slept on the floor. People under escort were forced to clean the roads and administrative buildings. We were not given any food, we stole from the vegetable gardens, and sometimes our Russian friends brought us something to eat.

By the end of August the prisoners had a foreboding. The Germans reinforced the guarding in the ghetto and became even more brutal. Rosa and I tried to escape. Father cried, 'Don't do it, they will kill you!' But we still took the risk. It happened on 1st September. There was an old German on guard. We told him that we were going to visit our grandma at the 'Blue Summer House.' He let us through and turned away from us.

We didn't know where to go. Mother gave us her friend's address. He was a hospital employee; his name was Yurinov. He was Russian and lived with his big family in a village not far from the town of Pustoshka, 40 km from Nevel. He had promised to help us. We walked during nights and during

daytime we hid in the forest. Yurinov's family received us very warmly. We hid in the forest at daytime and came to his house at night. In several days Yurinov's younger son came to our refuge in the forest and cried, 'Mrs. Svoiskaya has arrived!' We ran to the house. We found our mother completely tortured, naked, wearing someone's coat. She sat in the middle of the room and went on, 'It's all over now, it's all over.' When she came to her senses she told us what had happened.

On 6th September the Germans eliminated the Nevel ghetto. At first they took away all men, most of them were old men, and my father and brother were among them. They were made to dig out three huge pits. Then all of them were shot. After that all women and children were taken away and children were pulled away from their mothers. Everyone was undressed and shot.

When the first burst was fired and they could hear the bullets whining, Mother pushed Minya into the pit and jumped into it too. Dead bodies began to fall on them from above. The Germans did not fill up the pits, they just left. At night Mother managed to get out from under the corpses and crawled out of the grave. She tried to find Minya, called her by the name, but it was useless. My grandma Rakhil also remained in that pit. Mother found a man's coat, put it on and went to Pustoshka.

Several days passed. The number of Germans increased around Pustoshka. Yurinov told us that he could not continue hiding us, as it was too dangerous. He gave us clothes, food and we left for Pskov. On the way to Pskov we created a legend about ourselves. Rosa and I had blue eyes and did not look like typical Jews. We invented a name and a story for us: we passed ourselves off for the Suvorov family, from Leningrad, who had spent the summer at our grandma's place in Minsk, got under bombing and lost our documents. Mother, who had a typical Jewish appearance, pretended to be a stranger, whom we met on our way to Pskov.

We came to Ostrov. Rosa and I settled with a Russian woman separately from Mother in order not to arouse suspicions, though there was no ghetto in the town so far, and Jews walked along the streets freely. We had a happy encounter here: we found our Minya. She also managed to get out of the grave and a German gave her a lift to Ostrov: her Russian appearance helped her. Minya also invented a legend for herself; she had already obtained an 'Ausweis' [a new passport] by that time and found a job. Later on Rosa and I also obtained documents at the commandant's office. We washed German clothes and got bread and soap for this work. We helped our landlady in her vegetable garden and our mother, a wonderful knitter, traveled around villages and knitted cardigans.

Later on we got acquainted with Ostrov underground movement members, the leader of which was Klava Nazarova. Klava promised to take us to the guerillas. In spring of 1942 Shura Kozlovsky, a guerilla messenger, led one of the underground members, Yeva Khaikina and two Red Army men, who escaped from prison, to the guerilla camp. They were ambushed on their way to the camp. Shura and Yeva perished and those, who were taken prisoners, gave away those members of the underground party, whom they knew. Klava Nazarova was hanged.

We continued to seek contact with guerillas. Mother was first to get there. She was knitting a cardigan for a woman, whose husband was a guerilla messenger. He transferred Mother to the troop. Soon we also managed to join the guerillas. We were interrogated in the troop by Special Department Head, Pyatkin. He was trying to find out if we were German spies. We managed to persuade him that it was not true.



We were in different troops. Rosa worked as an interpreter at the headquarters, I worked as a nurse and Minya was a shooter. Soon Mother was sent by plane to the hinterland near Valday. She was accompanying the wounded. We were also offered to join her, but we refused flatly. Mother later got over to Kazan, where her brother Isaih evacuated from Leningrad [St. Petersburg]. We continued to wage war.

Our life at the guerilla troop was very difficult. We were almost starving, lived in earth-houses and moved from one site to another constantly. In May 1943 Germans encircled our troop. We tried to break the siege and lost Minya during the battle. After the combat a boy came running from Klimov's troop, where Minya served. He told us that she had been wounded in the leg and the Germans had seized her together with other wounded guerillas and had thrown them into a cellar. The boy was also among them, but he managed to escape. Andreyev, our troop commander, told us that we would not be able to rescue them from the Germans. Minya perished.

In one of the combats a shell exploded near me and I pressed my hands against my face instinctively. This saved my eyes, as the splinter got into my hand. The next day Rosa was killed in one of the military operations against the Germans. Andreyev suggested that they sent me to Kazan, where my mother lived. He told me: 'Your mother has no one except for you, all the rest are dead. She will not endure it if you are also killed.' But I refused to go to the hinterland. I told him that I wanted to take revenge on the Germans for the death of my relatives.

I stayed in the troop until March 1944, when we joined the active Red Army forces. Most of the guerillas were killed in battles, including the commander of our troop. Our troop was disbanded. We were assembled at Khvoinaya station in Leningrad region for a two-week vacation. We were trying to come to our senses. This station is located not far from Leningrad, a very picturesque place. We spent time there as if in a health center. All guerilla troops from Leningrad region gathered there and our headquarters were situated on Dekabristov Street.

The headquarters issued us certificates and assigned us to different cities. I was assigned to Gatchina, but I did not go there, because I was shown letters from my mother, in which she asked about my sisters and me. Mother's address in Kazan was written on the envelope, so I decided to go to Kazan. When I found the required street in Kazan, I suddenly saw Mother, who was walking out of the Municipal Party Committee, crying. She was told that two of her daughters were killed in the guerilla troop. So that was how we met.

My sisters Rosa and Minya were buried in the forest where we were guerillas. My father, grandmother and brother Boris remained in the grave with murdered Jews in Nevel. There are three graves: men's, women's and children's. After the war the Jews collected funds, which were used for erecting a monument on the graves.

#### My relative's fates

Mother's and Father's sisters' fate appeared to be more successful. I remember only Aunt Golda, Father's sister, who lived in Nevel with her family. Before the war she was a housewife and her husband, Leiba Treskunov, was a horse-breeder at a stud-farm. When the war began they were on time to evacuate to Tatarstan, so all their family survived. After the war they returned to Nevel. Two of their daughters are alive: Sterna, who is 91 years old now and lives in Leningrad. And Ida, who is 80, lives with her family in Israel. About my father's other relatives I know only the following:

his sister Ida lived in Moscow, Tsilya lived in Tver and his brother Mendel lived in Nizhny Novgorod. I have no other information about them.

We kept closer relations with my mother's brothers and sisters. Mother's elder brother Chaim lived in Rybinsk. He died during the war. There were no Germans, so his wife Tesya and daughter Minna survived. Chaim was an Orthodox Jew. When he came to visit us in Nevel he always prayed. At least I always saw him praying. When in 1945 the war ended, Jews were allowed to gather in their apartments to pray there and to celebrate Sabbath and other holidays. However, such gatherings were not advertised. In 1948 when Stalin's repressions and persecutions of Zionists were resumed, such gatherings in apartments were completely closed down again.

Mom's brother Isaih lived in Leningrad before the war, we visited him during school holidays. His wife's name was Zhenya and they had a son, whose name was Sima. During the war they were in evacuation in Kazan, where first my mother found him and later on I joined them. Uncle Isaih came back from the war to Leningrad. He was an agricultural specialist. He died at the age of 54 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery. His son became a geologist, graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Mines. He died 15 years ago.

Mendel or Mikhail Gendel lived in Nevel before the war, worked as a printer at the printing-house there. At the age of 35 without attending classes he passed exams to the Smolensk Medical Institute. Right before the war, when he was 40 years old, he graduated from this institute and worked as a medical officer, a surgeon, during the war. He came back to Nevel after the war and got married soon. His wife Malka was a physician too. She was much younger than him: Malka was my elder sister Rosa's friend.

Their daughter Natalia was born in 1950. I separated from my mother after the war. Mother went back to Nevel and continued to work as a matron at the municipal hospital. I left for Leningrad to study. In 1945 I entered the Leningrad Institute of Mines and lived in the dormitory on Maly Prospect on Vassilyevsky Island. I did not feel any anti-Semitism at the institute. There were only two Jews at our faculty.

## Later life

After graduation I was sent or assigned, as it was called [10](#), to the city of Karaganda [today Kazakhstan]. Assignment was a compulsory appointment for young specialists, everyone was supposed to work for two years at the place of destination. I worked at the Giproshakht Institute, which designed mines. My mother came to Karaganda, but couldn't stand the local climate and left for Leningrad to her brother's place. She visited the Leningrad Municipal Party Committee and told them about her fate. They allocated a small room for her, with an area of six square meters, in a communal apartment [11](#). I arrived at this room two years later, when I was transferred to the Lengiproshakht Institute [same Institute as Giproshakht, but in Leningrad]. I worked in this institute between 1952 and 1977, for 25 years. We exchanged this room for a bigger one of 13 square meters later on.

I was married twice. My first husband, Naum Bainstein, was a Jew. He was born in Leningrad in the 1920s and worked at the 'Vibrator' plant as an office worker. I got acquainted with him after returning from Karaganda, my relative introduced us. However, we lived together for two years, I think, not longer than that. After that we parted very quietly and peacefully and remained friends.



Naum is no longer alive by now, but I don't know when he died.

In 1958 I married Iosif Lipovich Nemizansky, everybody called him Iosif Lvovich. He was also a Jew. He was born in 1912 in Nevel. His father came from Nevel. His name was Lipa Nemizansky and I don't know what his occupation was. His mother's name was Rakhil, she came from a small Latvian town, Vendan. Her father was a local rabbi and her family was very wealthy. When Lipa and Rakhil got married, they lived in Nevel at first and later moved to Leningrad. My husband had a brother, but he died before the war.

My second husband was not a religious Jew either, like many Jews in Leningrad at that time. Iosif graduated from Leningrad Polytechnic Institute, the Faculty of Metallurgy, and had been working for many years at the open-hearth shop of Kirovsky plant. During the war the family stayed in besieged Leningrad. My husband's father starved to death during the blockade [12](#) and was buried in a common grave at the Jewish cemetery. Iosif continued to work at Kirovsky plant until it was evacuated to Chelyabinsk. Both he and his mother, completely dystrophic, were taken out of the city. His mother died right after the war.

I didn't meet my husband's parents; I saw them only on photographs. According to the photos, they were beautiful people, very elegantly dressed. My husband, their son, was also a very handsome man. He was twelve years older than me; we lived in harmony for 22 years. We adored each other and called each other only by endearing names: Iosinka, Tanechka. He suffered from infectious polyarthritis. He once caught a flu, and this polyarthritis was an aftereffect. Half of our life I dedicated to taking care of my husband. He continued working at Kirovsky plant, already sick. He had a position of the open-hearth shop manager at that plant.

My mother lived together with us and was on very good terms with Iosif. Mother was a real needlewoman, she embroidered beautifully. I keep a lot of her works, mostly various pictures: embroidered landscapes and animals. She also continued to knit very nice cardigans.

There was no anti-Semitism before the war, it started to appear after the war [13](#) and of course during the war. The Soviet regime propagandized internationalism, thus we never felt any anti-Semitism among the Russian population during the war in areas, which were not occupied by the Germans. During the war we suffered only from the Germans, most of the Russians assisted us very much. I did not feel any anti-Semitism at work, it depended on the team and we had a lot of Jews in our team. Our institute manager, Shvernik, looked for and accepted all smart Jews, who were fired from other places.

I was not disturbed by the Doctors' Plot [14](#), but a huge tide of anti-Semitism arose. Our neighbors at home yelled at my mother that it's a pity that so few Jews had been eliminated by the Germans, that Jews had not even been at war, but had stayed in the hinterland. Mother quarreled with them and even fought with some of them in the yard. She submitted applications to the militia about these cases. A rumor was spread in the city that all Jews would be gathered and sent to Siberia in special trains [15](#). Certainly we suffered a lot from it, we were happy when Stalin died and the physicians were rehabilitated. No one in our family grieved because of Stalin's death.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when religion was not persecuted, Mother prayed a lot. My husband and me took her to the synagogue and brought her back regularly every week. Mother died in 1976 of stomach cancer. She was 82 years old by then. The two last weeks of her life were very painful for

me; I stayed at her side. Mother was buried at the Jewish cemetery.

In 1977, when I was 53, I had to quit my job ahead of pension schedule, since my husband was a totally helpless man by that time. He died in 1980, four years after my mother had died. He was also buried at the Jewish cemetery near my mom. We did not have children.

Now I would like to say a few words about my friends. I always had Jews as friends, some of the old prewar friends came back from evacuation to Nevel, but many of them left for Israel. They formed a Nevel society there, with which I keep contact by letters and phone. Some of my friends left for Germany and America. There are few Jews in Nevel now: 10-15 families, not more. Our close friends invited us to go to Israel with them, but my husband Iosif was very sick by that time, he was bedridden, and certainly he could not move anywhere. We took our friends' leave very hard, continued to correspond with them for many years. They have died already, our friends were very old people. Very few of my colleagues are still alive.

I still keep very close relations with my cousin Natalia Mikhailovna, Uncle Mendel's daughter. Natasha lives now with her husband and her mother in Nevel. She graduated from Pskov Pedagogical Institute and worked as a teacher of English – first at school and now at a college. Her husband, Mikhail Israilevich Zaidman, works at a clothes factory. Her son lives in Germany and studies at the Construction Faculty of Darmstadt University. When he visits our city, he stays with me. Natalia's daughter Maya lives with me in St. Petersburg. She has just graduated from the Trade Institute as an accountant/auditor. I visit Nevel sometimes. My cousin's family are my closest relatives now.

Life has become more interesting. I spend all my spare time at the library, read newspapers and magazines and take great interest in everything that's happening in the world. Certainly I am very much worried about Israel. We were very worried about it in 1967 [16](#), in 1973 [17](#), and of course, we are very worried now. Each terrorist action echoes with pain in my heart.

I support all democratic undertakings in this country: Gorbachev [18](#), Yeltsin and Putin. I like the RFU faction [Right Forces Union], headed by Nemtsov, but I am mostly happy to see manifestation of good relations between this country and Israel.

My Jewish life changed a lot after in 1993 I became a member of the Society of Former Ghetto and Concentration Camp Prisoners, located on Gatchinskaya Street. Later on I started to visit 'Yeva' on Moika and the Jewish Welfare Center 'Hesed Avraham.' I made a lot of friends there, we celebrate Jewish holidays together, attend lectures and concerts. We take great interest in Jewish history and traditions. I receive monthly packages and warm clothes in Hesed and use their other services, which are free of charge – order glasses, go to the hairdresser's, etc.. I also received two grants as a former ghetto prisoner from Switzerland. Germany still transfers me 250 Deutschmarks every month starting from 1995. All this supports me very much and I am very grateful for this assistance as well as for the attention.

## **Glossary:**

### **[1](#) Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos

Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hased helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hased provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hased centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hased centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

## **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 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.

## **4 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **5 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.

## **6 Torgsin stores**

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

## **7 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 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.

## **8 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.

## **9 School #**

Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

## **10 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.

## **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 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.

### **13 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.'

### **14 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.

### **15 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

### **16 Six-Day-War**

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

## **17 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)**

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

## **18 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.