

# Mirrah Kogan

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Natalia Fomina

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Mirrah Lvovna Kogan is a little woman with short hair and shining blue eyes. She is full of optimism and displays a kind attitude toward people. Mirrah lives with her older daughter and her family in her parents' apartment. Mirrah's daughter is an invalid and the main part of the household is hers. Because her younger daughter lives in Israel, Mirrah cares for international politics very much. During our conversation her ten-year-old great-grandson Mark came into the room listening to the story of his great-grandmother and looking at old pictures.

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## My family history

My grandfather on my father's side, Gersh Kogan, was born in the town of Zinkovtsy, Podolsk province [Vinnitsa region at present], in the 1850s. My grandfather's family was religious. They observed all Jewish traditions and my father was raised religiously. In the pictures I have of my grandfather, he wears traditional Jewish clothes, a beard and payot and a yarmulka or a hat. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. He died in the 1890s.

My grandmother was born in the 1850s. I don't know her first name or her maiden name. She was a housewife. My grandmother died in the early 1880s, when my father was a small boy. Besides my father my grandparents had two sons and a daughter from what I know.

I have no information about one of the sons, but my father's older brother Zalman Kogan lived in Chernovtsy. Zalman had a son and a daughter: Moisey and Musia. Moisey moved to Odessa before the Revolution of 1917 [1](#). Musia and her family stayed in Chernovtsy. Later they moved to Izmail. When Izmail became part of the USSR in 1940 [cf. Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union] [2](#) I saw Musia for the first time – she came to Odessa to take her husband to the clinic of a well-known doctor Buchshtab. Musia told us about anti-Semitism existing during the Romanian regime [cf. Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania] [3](#). Musia's husband was sick and died in hospital before the war. Musia survived the Great Patriotic War [4](#), and after the war she was the manager of a pharmacy in Izmail for many years.

My father's sister Rachel emigrated to America in 1915. Rachel was married, but I don't remember her husband's name. Her daughters moved to Argentina later on. She corresponded with my father before the Great Patriotic War. After the war we didn't receive any letters.

My grandmother on my mother's side, Miriam Kogan, was born in the town of Rotmistrovka, Kiev province, in the 1840s. I don't remember my grandmother's maiden name. She was a housewife. My grandmother died in 1891 when my mother was eight.

My grandfather on my mother's side, Nuhim-Leib Kogan, was born in Rotmistrovka in the 1840s. I don't know what he did for a living. Like all other Jews in the town he was religious. He attended the synagogue and observed all the traditions. After my grandmother died my grandfather got married again. His second wife's name was Perl. My grandfather died after a surgery he had in Kiev in the 1890s. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery there. I was at his grave with my parents when I was six, in 1925.

My grandfather had three children with his first wife: two daughters, Doba and Polia and a son, Semyon. He had three more children with Perl: Natan, Naum and Fenia. All the children were born in Rotmistrovka.

I guess my mother's older sister Doba was born in the 1860s. She was much older than my mother since she already had children of her own when my mother was born. After getting married Doba left Rotmistrovka for a neighboring village – I don't know its name. She had eleven or twelve children. I guess Doba and her husband were religious Jews. In the 1920s Doba's family moved to Odessa with the younger children. During the war, in 1941 Doba, her husband and four of their children perished in the ghetto in Odessa.

My mother's brother Semyon Kogan was born in 1885. He was a clerk at a fabric store in Odessa. He was married. His wife's name was Clara. They had a daughter, Mura. During the Soviet period Semyon was a supply agent. He traveled to Germany before Hitler came to power [5](#). When we talked about the persecution of Jews in Germany in the 1930s uncle Semyon said he didn't understand what was happening to the Germans. He said he couldn't believe what was said. He said, 'This may just be propaganda.' During the Great Patriotic War uncle Semyon stayed in Odessa. He was killed during a raid after the Romanian headquarters' was blasted in 1941. Clara and Mura perished in the ghetto.

My mother's younger sister Polia was born in 1887. Long before I was born she moved to Odessa where she married Grigory Shwalboim, the owner of a small fabric store. They had two children: Musia and Lyonia. In 1925 Grigory moved to Palestine following his brothers. Uncle Grigory was going to take his family there after he had settled down, but shortly after he had gone the borders were closed and we didn't receive any letters from him. [In the late 1920s Soviet citizens had severe restrictions in their departures.] Aunt Polia and her children stayed in the Soviet Union.

Aunt Polia was a seamstress. Her neighbor reported on her to the Soviet authorities stating that she had gold and Polia was arrested in 1933. My mother and Uncle Semyon went to consult lawyers to help her out of prison. She was released in a month. At the beginning of World War II, Polia and her children evacuated to Margilan [3000 km from Odessa, in Uzbekistan]. After the war they returned to Odessa. We heard about Uncle Grigory in the late 1960s. His son Lyonia visited him in Israel. Aunt Polia died in 1975. Musia left for Israel in 1975 to join her father, who died shortly afterward. Lyonia got married in Odessa, and his family moved to Israel in 1992.

My mother's half-brother Natan lived in Odessa. He was married to his niece Dora, the daughter of his older half-sister Doba. She was a beautiful girl and he fell in love with her. They had two

children. The son perished in 1945 in Poland. Dora died in the 1970s and Natan died in the 1980s. Their daughter lives in the US. She emigrated after her parents died.

My mother's other half-brother Naum was in the people's volunteer corps [6](#). He either perished during the defense of Odessa, or later in the ghetto. His wife Lusia and their daughter Jeanne were in evacuation somewhere. After the war they lived in Moscow. They visited us several times when they came to Odessa.

My mother's half-sister Fenia was born in 1899. She came from Rotmistrovka, Kiev province, to Odessa when she was 13. Like my mother she was religious. She lived with my parents at the beginning. She was my mother's assistant at work. In 1928 she became a seamstress at a garment shop. During the war she was in evacuation. She was married but had no children. Her husband died in 1951 and she died in the early 1960s.

My mother Edis Kogan was born in Rotmistrovka, Kiev province, in 1883. The wealthy family of Grutskiye took my mother to their house. She helped them with the housework. They treated my mother very well. She learned to read and write in Russian from their son Shulim and she also learned to sew from his mother. When my mother was 15 or 16, Hanna Itzkovich, the wife of her cousin Semyon, invited her to move to Odessa. Hanna was a seamstress. Seamstresses at that time made shirts and decorated women's underwear with lace. My mother learned all this from Aunt Hanna.

My mother became a very professional seamstress and made high quality shirts. She got a job offer from a well-known garment factory in Odessa owned by Ptashnikov. My mother's shirts were sent to an international exhibition in Paris in the 1900s where she was awarded a diploma. Next year the owner of the factory was planning to send my mother and her products to another exhibition in Paris. Ptashnikov's son was supposed to go with her to represent the company. My mother already knew my father at the time – since she was so pretty, her fiancé didn't allow her to take the trip to Paris and my mother didn't go.

My father, Leib Kogan, was born in the town of Zinkovtsy, Podolsk province, in 1873. My father studied at cheder for three years. After my grandmother died he went to work as a servant for a wealthy Jew in the town. In the late 1880s, when he was 15, he moved to some relatives in Odessa. He became an apprentice of a typesetter at the printing house of the publisher Kozman. This publishing house was famous for publishing German and French textbooks and dictionaries for self-education. We had one such German textbook before the war – my father showed it to me. My father was eager to study somewhere, but he was too poor. However, by self-education he learned Russian, German and some French besides Yiddish and Hebrew. In a few years he managed to get a job as a typesetter at the same printing house. He met my mother in the early 1900s.

My parents got married around 1905. I am sure that they had a traditional Jewish wedding since both of them came from religious families and were raised religiously. After their wedding my parents rented an apartment in the building where Hanna lived – we always had very warm relationships with her. When my father got married his relatives helped him to get a job of a clerk in a fabric store, since working in the printing house was hazardous because of the lead dust. My mother continued to work at the Ptashnikov factory.

In 1906 my parents moved to Ekaterininskaya Street, to a four-room apartment where they lived their further life, and I live here as well. In 1907 my mother gave birth to a boy. He was a very weak boy and had rachitis. I know that my mother tried all she could to cure him, but he died in 1912. My mother had a nervous breakdown and my father sent her to a recreation center in Puscha-Voditsa near Kiev to improve her nervous system. My mother gave birth to my older brother Haim at home with a midwife attending to her. He was born in 1914, and we all called him Munia.

## Growing up

I was born in 1919. I had been registered as Miriam in honor of my mother's mother, but all my life they called me Mirrah at work and at home. On that day my mother's friend's daughter had a wedding party in our apartment. This idea occurred to my mother since her friend was not very wealthy. She started childbirth while she was helping in the kitchen. I was born at the moment when the bride and bridegroom were standing under the chuppah.

I've lived my life in this apartment. One room here was my mother's shop, Munia and I had a children's room, another room was my parents' bedroom and we also had a dining room. There were two beds with metal balls in my parents' bedroom. Munia and I liked to play with them since we learned to unscrew them. There were also two mahogany wardrobes and a chest of drawers. There was a beautiful tiled stove in the dining room with a border of brown tiles and stucco of a girl's figure in the middle. There was a big table too, a floor mirror, a marble board and a beautiful clock. There was a low table in the corner – we called it a samovar-table since there was a samovar on it. A big portrait of Leo Tolstoy [7](#) hung above it. There were two rubber plants and a piano, on which I was taught to play.

My mother worked at home. Her younger, married sister Fenia worked with her. My mother had a hemstitch machine and a sewing machine. At first my mother worked as a small entrepreneur and in 1936 she began to work for a central department store, only she did her work at home. She had many orders since she was a very skilled seamstress. She had so many orders that she even had to refuse sometimes.

My father was a worker at a plant after the October Revolution and later he tried to make shoe polish. I was a little child then and don't remember the details. Later my father began to work with my mother. He fixed her equipment and made bed sheets.

Munia was supposed to go to school in the early 1920s. That was shortly after the Civil War [8](#) a hard period of famine and an epidemic of the Spanish flu that caused the death of many people. Going to school was out of the question. In 1922 my brother began to have private classes at home with Anna Yakovlevna Naskhovich, who was called Mairo at home for some reason. She was a very nice, short young woman. She had finished grammar school and was a very good teacher. She gave classes to my brother and to a few other children too. They had classes sitting at the dinner table in the dining room. I often sat under the table during classes and listened to them. Sometimes when the teacher asked questions and none of her pupils knew the answer, I answered the question from beneath the table. I was five and I learned to read at that time.

At the age of twelve my brother got bronchitis and needed to breathe air in the steppe and eat good food. My mother rented a room at the Dachnaya Resort, about 20 kilometers from Odessa.

Munia, Mairo, and I went there for the whole summer. I remember that Mairo took us to a village where we had cow milk. There were fruit trees growing near our house. We picked and ate sweet yellow cherries, apricots, apples and pears. We got suntanned and strong. Munia was cured. When I was a small girl I adored Munia and kept on his tail and he often complained to Mother, 'How long am I going to walk with this little tail?'

Since my mother and father worked hard, our family was wealthy. We had lunch in the dining room at the table covered with a tablecloth. My seat was beside my father's. Our father said a blessing before we had a meal: 'Barukh, atah, adonai...' [Blessed are you, Lord... – first words of Judaic blessing]. When the first fruit or berries got ripe our father said a blessing for that too. My parents observed all Jewish traditions and rituals.

I was very happy when Friday came since I knew that our mother wasn't going to do her work on that day. On Friday she wore a dark shawl and lit candles. Sabbath was a holy day, when our parents went to the synagogue. My mother made rolls with poppy-seeds and prepared a delicious dinner. My parents didn't work on this day; my mother didn't do any work at home. We, children were not required to observe Saturday since we were not raised religiously.

We only had kosher food. I used to take chickens to the shochet, who lived across the street. If we bought fresh meat we sprinkled it with salt. Salt absorbed blood and we washed the meat several times before it could be cooked. My mother made chicken broth and soups, chicken neck stuffed with eggs, flour, fat and onions, and she also made delicious gefilte fish. She made pies with jam and poppy seeds and honey cakes and white latkes – sponge cake. My mother also made marinated eggplants.

My parents spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian to us. I could understand Yiddish well. Until 1941 our parents observed all Jewish holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim, Simchat Torah, Chanukkah, Pesach. I have memories of such a thing as Chanukkah gelt that my brother and I received at Chanukkah. At Pesach we used to have a festive dinner with matzah. Our father told us about the exodus of Jews from Egypt, but we didn't have Seder conducted.

However, I would say our parents were moderately religious, since they didn't force me or my brother to pray or go to the synagogue. We were growing up like all other Soviet children in that time. We grew up as atheists. My brother Munia and I were Komsomol [9](#) members and had up-to-date outlooks. The morale that we were inspired with at school was in no conflict with the moral principles that we learned at home. Our teachers and parents taught us to respect other people and ourselves, be honest and hardworking and help people. Our parents respected our ideas and my brother and I treated our parents with respect and supported our family traditions.

I went to school in 1927. This school was named after Illich [V. I. Lenin] and it was on the corner of Troitskaya and Preobrazhenskaya Street, in the center of Odessa, not far from where we resided. Before 1934 it was a Russian school, after 1934 it became a Ukrainian school. This was one the best schools in the town and to be admitted there children had to take entrance exams. I passed my exam brilliantly.

My first teacher, Elizaveta Pavlovna Studenetskaya, had been a teacher at a grammar school before the revolution. She was not Jewish. She was a great teacher and a great person. Elizaveta Pavlovna taught us many things besides teaching us to write. She staged children's fairy tales with

us, and our parents were delighted to watch them. I also remember Antonina Fyodorovna, our Ukrainian teacher. She was a charming and nice lady. She was so good at teaching that thanks to her I became fond of the Ukrainian language and never forgot it.

When I was 11, I was very happy to become a pioneer [10](#). There were certain requirements to become a pioneer: one should be a good person and an industrious pupil. There was an admission ceremony and it was very exciting. We had a school pioneer leader, Zoya, and we became tutors in junior classes. When I was in the sixth grade I became a pioneer tutor of the fourth grade. We helped pupils with their studies, arranged parties and concerts as well as sport contests. We also had a joiner shop at school where we enjoyed working. In addition we got hot lunch or breakfast at the school canteen.

During the famine of 1933 [11](#) we received buns at school. It was a hard period for our family. My mother took any job she could find. Repainting of shoes was in fashion and my mother learned to paint shoes. When pleated skirts came in fashion my mother learned to make them. Munia and I were helping her with ironing. We earned our living in this way and didn't starve. There were Torgsin stores [12](#) opened at that time. One could buy food products in exchange for gold in those stores. My mother took all her golden jewelry there: earrings, chain and rings. She baked bread from the flour that she got. She also added some sunflower seed wastes.

All our relatives were trying to stick together in those hard years and my mother was supporting them. She was very responsive and kind. I remember an old Jewish man who joined us for lunch once a week after 1933. It was customary for Jewish families that once a week old Jews who couldn't provide food for themselves came to have lunch with a family they had an arrangement with.

My brother Munia studied at home until it was time for him to go to the sixth grade. After he finished school he went to study at the Rabfak [13](#) and then he entered the Odessa Industrial Institute. In 1939 he finished the Faculty of Water Piping and Sewerage. After he graduated, he got a job assignment [14](#) for the construction of water cleaning facilities in Lublino near Moscow. Some of his fellow students went there too. My brother and I got along well and were the best friends when we were students.

After finishing the eighth grade some of my schoolmates and I also went to the Rabfak. In 1936 I entered the Sanitary and Hygiene Faculty of the Medical Institute. I had to study a lot there; it was a very challenging institute. I became a Komsomol member at the institute. I took an active part in public life and had many friends among the students. We enjoyed attending parties at the institute. We didn't have any problems associated with the issues of nationality.

My close friend Tsylia Rendel – we were at the same school once – lived in my neighborhood. Tsylia's father was the director of a state-owned tobacco factory. He was an old revolutionary and an outstanding person. His portrait was on the board of respectable people in town at the Opera Theater. In 1935 he was awarded with a car – this was one of the very few cars in Odessa. Tsylia was dating a young engineer, Buma. He was a handsome man and could play the piano well. We got together at her place and had wonderful gatherings.

In 1937 Tsylia's father was arrested [during the so-called Great Terror] [15](#) and shot. [During the period of Stalin's repression the authorities never informed the relatives about the cause of arrest.]



Tsylvia and her sister Dusya lost both parents since their mother had died some time before. When this happened my mother took Tsylvia and Dusya to our home. Later they went back to their apartment and their aunt took care of them.

When this happened many friends stopped visiting them, but not Buma. Tsylvia wasn't a pretty girl and her friends gossiped that Buma was seeing her for her father's position. However, Buma married her. Tsylvia went to work and her younger sister studied at school. During World War II they evacuated to Tashkent. After the war Tsylvia stayed in Tashkent. Her father was rehabilitated [16](#) after Stalin died.

In 1937 the parents of my schoolmate Mila Medvedeva were arrested too. Then we understood that there was something wrong about what was happening around us. Later, in 1940 the leadership called this period the period of Yezhov [17](#).

Shulim Grutskiy and his wife Katia were good friends of our family. Shulim was the son of those people my mother had lived with in Rotmistrovka. Shulim's family was wealthier than ours. Shulim and Katia visited us every Saturday. The adults were discussing political subjects. Shulim criticized the Soviet power, but my mother said, 'I couldn't study and Leib couldn't either. We've lived a hard life. So when my daughter and son study at the institute and I don't hear the word 'zhyd' [abusive word for a Jew] I would agree to eat waste and pray for the Soviet power.' Shulim could raise no objection to this statement. I've always remembered what my mother said.

We didn't face any anti-Semitism then. Only our parents knew what it was like. [Editor's note: In tsarist Russia Jews suffered from national discrimination: they were allowed to live and do business only within the Pale of Settlement [18](#), there was a limit of 5% of Jews [19](#) to be admitted to secondary and higher educational institutions, Jews were not allowed to hold any official positions, and there were also other restrictions.] We didn't care about the issues of nationality in our time.

In May 1941 we had our graduation exams at the institute. We were photographed for our graduation albums and had an arrangement at a restaurant for our prom when the war began, on 22nd June. My parents were in despair: in 1941 Munia went to Belostok with a construction team to build fortifications. Belostok was in Western Belarus. The radio said there were Germans there already. I ran to the post office to send a cable to my brother. Fortunately my brother and some others escaped from there. He returned to Moscow.

## **During the war**

The institute rescheduled our last exams in surgery for 25th June and we were to be examined for 'field surgery.' We passed our last exam and immediately 120 of our boys were sent to the front. I was assigned to a railroad clinic as a physician. But we were raised in such a spirit of Soviet patriotism that the only thought I had was to join the rows of defenders of the Motherland. I ran to the military registry office. An officer there put down all information required and told me to go home and wait until they contacted me.

In a few days I received a subpoena from them. I was to come to a gathering place with all necessary belongings. My mother didn't cry – she just helped me to get packed. My parents were concerned about my life, of course, but they did understand what motives I was driven by. In the morning of 17th July I put on my new crêpe de Chine dress made by my mother, took my suitcase,

and my father and I went to the port. My mother had a high fever and stayed at home. I boarded a boat to Kherson. I stood on the stern and my father was on the pier. The boat was full of recruits. We were singing a popular song: 'Farewell, our dear town – tomorrow we are sailing off into the sea.' I met Zhenia Lerner on the ship, who also graduated from our institute. We became friends.

From Kherson we were taken to Melitopol [360 km to the East from Odessa] where a division was formed. Zhenia Lerner and I were sent to rifle battalion 973 in the village of Konstantinovka near Melitopol. In my company there were two doctors – my friend and I – two assistant doctors, two sanitary instructors and 24 sanitary carts and drivers. We also had boxes of bandage materials.

I was the head of three sanitary platoons of the battalion. The commanders of the platoons were graduates from a military medical school. They had excellent knowledge of the contents of bandage packages. They trained Zhenia and me, the assistant doctors and the attendants, who were civilians and didn't have any knowledge of military procedures. We received uniforms three weeks later, before that I wore my crêpe de Chine dress and high-heeled shoes. My subordinates reported to me every morning.

At the beginning of August 1941 Germans were near Kherson and Odessa was holding its defense. The commander of the battalion and I were sent to inspect the site for our deployment. Our truck drove into a village where a battle was on. This was the first time I saw Germans. We turned around and left the village. I knew how serious the situation was at the front and sent cables home every day telling my family to leave immediately.

My parents obtained tickets from the military registry office. They had this right since I was at the front. In August they boarded a boat and on the way my mother convinced my father to go to see me in Melitopol. They believed it was so far away from the frontline. They got off the boat in Kerch and came to Melitopol. From there they were sent to Konstantinovka where I was. They saw me wearing my uniform and a gun holster. By that time they already knew that our army was retreating and that the situation was very serious. My parents stayed with me overnight and in the morning the commander of our regiment issued a certificate confirming that they were parents of a military heading for Kuibyshev. He ordered to take them to Melitopol. I shall never forget how my mother was crying when they were put on a cart and I heard her crying until I lost sight of the cart.

We were soon moved to the vicinity of Zaporozhiye where we were actively involved in combat action. Our troops incurred big losses retreating; 1941 and 1942 were very hard years. In January our rifle regiment began to push the Germans. In April 1942 we took hold of the railroad station of Lozovaya. This was quite a victory and even major newspapers wrote about this event.

At the beginning of May 1942 we were involved in a big attack on Kharkov. I remember how we took hold of the town of Sakhnovschina and then lost it and then entered it again. In a few hours the Germans, who held the town, burned it down and shot almost all the population. I cannot forget a girl – the Germans tied her by her legs to two birch trees bending them to the ground. When the trees unbent they tore the girl in half.

We were moving towards Kharkov. Near Barvenkovo our troops were encircled. This encirclement is known as Izyum-Barvenkovo. It's hard to find words to express what it was like. Dozens of thousands of people were in the encirclement. The Germans continuously bombed us. During one of these bombardments a splinter hit my leg. The leg got swollen and we had to cut the boot to pull



it off. Zhenia and I were in a ravine with bunches of people around. German soldiers were descending in rows firing in the area. I got wounded by a bullet in my buttocks.

The Germans chased us out of the ravine and separated those that could move from those that were not able to walk. Zhenia took me aside and sat beside me. In order to stay with me she injured her leg with a medical scissors. Zhenia and I took off our military shirts – we had blouses underneath and were going to pretend that we were civilians involved in the excavation of trenches. The Germans brought trucks and Zhenia pulled me to a truck where two tall Germans were watching the boarding process. One of them asked the other, pointing at me, ‘Jude?’ and the other replied, ‘Nicht Jude.’ This saved my life.

We were driven to Barvinkovo and accommodated in the building of a school fenced with barbed wire. There was a hospital for prisoners-of-war deployed at school. When I was taken for bandaging, I saw Henry Khatskilevich, the chief surgeon of our army. He had been our lecturer at the institute and I knew him well. He was a Jew, but pretended he was a Karaim. He managed to escape. He returned to Odessa after the war and worked at the clinic of the famous professor Nalivkin [which was not a private clinic]. We met in 1946 again.

Zhenia got very scared when I used to lose consciousness because in my delirium I was giving orders and that might have disclosed our identity. Zhenia covered me with her body. My wound was healing very slowly. It was impossible to remove the splinter from my leg and I could only wait until it got out by itself or the wound would heal with the splinter inside. Whenever I came to have a dressing applied on my wound Henry gave me extra bandage and iodine.

Once I mentioned to him that Zhenia and I would try to escape. Three weeks later we were told to come outside to go to the railway station. Zhenia and I tried to hide in a classroom, but the Germans found us and pushed us outside. Other prisoners were walking to the railway station. There were people on both sides of the street looking at the prisoners. The Germans ordered us to follow the others. There was a big truck at the entrance of the school building. We went behind the truck and plunged into the crowd. The crowd closed around us and began to move backwards.

A woman took us to her house. When the mistress of the house went to the kitchen to fetch us some milk I grabbed her pass from a chest of drawers. It was issued to Kovalenko Maria and allowed her go to the village. Of course, it wasn't decent from my part, but all I could think about was how to escape.

At night we left Barvenkovo and started moving to the direction of the frontline. I knew the area very well – this was where our battalion was located. We also walked during the day since we pretended we were civilians. This was at the beginning of July – it was very hot and the sand was overheated. My leg was still swollen and I had to go barefoot.

In a few days we reached a village which the Soviet troops had left a few hours before we came. There were Germans in the village, but our troops were in a forest across the nearby river. We came to a road leading to a bridge across the river. There were women walking on the road. We went to the bridge and when we came close to the women, they turned out to be German soldiers patrolling this section of the road. Zhenia and I were captured and taken to the commandant's office. We told them our story and I showed the pass that I had stolen from that kind woman.

The Germans ordered us to polish a few pairs of boots and buttons on their uniforms. At noon three men and we were taken to a field by the Germans. We were given spades and ordered to dig a pit. Then we were ordered to stand with our back to the pits. The Germans fired their guns. The men fell into the pit and Zhenia and I were told, 'Weg!' [German for 'Go!'] and we ran away at breakneck speed.

In the evening we reached a distant farm and ran into the house. An old woman came out saying, 'What do you want? I don't have anything.' We were telling her our story, when we heard screaming from the village. So she let us go to the attic. The old woman removed the ladder to the attic and we hid in the straw. It turned out that a Romanian division came to replace the German troops. Romanians began to rape women of every age. After they left in the morning, the village woman let us out.

So we moved on from the occupied territory from one village to another. We met another group of our disguised military. We didn't tell each other our names for reasons of safety. However, we all agreed to move in the direction of the frontline. We kept walking at night. I continued to apply bandages on my leg. During the day Zhenia and I went to villages to do any work we could find: in kitchens, gardens and farms. We also told fortunes by cards. People wanted to hear that their loved ones that were at the front were alive. We received bread or potatoes for our work. We shared food with our fellow travelers.

I remember, in one village we came into a nice big house, where we saw a sewing machine. I offered the mistress of the house to make a dress for her daughter. She gave me a piece of cloth and I made a dress in a few hours. I was still sewing when a neighbor ran into the house and said, 'They are looking for outsiders there. They took away some men. Hide your girls since they will get them, too.' The mistress of the house hid us in a closet. Our fellow travelers were captured and Zhenia and I were alone once again.

Around the end of September we came as far as the Rossosh River in Voronezh region. My legs were swollen and I got furuncles on my shins. We had to swim to the opposite bank since we were told there were fewer Germans there. The bank we were on was rusty and before I came to the water I cut all the boils on my legs. We tied our clothes to our neck to swim across the river.

I remember another episode, when we came to a village near Voronezh. We came into a house and were given some food. A humpbacked young man came into the house and said, 'There are girls in your house. They may stay here overnight and I will come for them in the morning.' In the morning he took us to the head of the village council. He interrogated us and we told them our tall story. Some people began to threaten to give us in to the Germans. We were so exhausted. Then at last those people told the humpbacked young man to take us out of the village. They said, 'If we see you again, it won't be good for you.' The humpbacked man took us to the field and on the way he tried to provoke us to tell him the truth. He said that he was the son of the head of the village and that his father was helping partisans, but we kept repeating our tall story and he let us go.

We were trying to avoid the Germans on our way. Winter began. We didn't have any warm clothes. We wrapped our legs with old rags that we got in a village. We wore boots, some old jackets and sack cloth on our heads. At the end of 1942 a village woman gave us shelter. We were helping her about the house.

At the end of January 1943 the Soviet troops got hold of Stalingrad [20](#) and were advancing to the west. The frontline moved to the village where we were staying. At night we heard the roar of the front. Zhenia and I ran out of the house and hid in the snow. We saw Germans running followed by our troops. It was a tank unit. We shouted, 'Guys! Guys!' I cannot tell you what we felt. The soldiers took us to the house and gave us hot tea to get warm. At that moment the door opened and Zhora Kogan-Volman stepped inside. He was an acquaintance of mine from the Odessa Polytechnic Institute. I wrote a letter to my parents in Kuibyshev and Zhora sent it via his field mail. My parents hadn't heard from me for eight months. We were given some food and winter jackets.

Zhenia and I had to go through an investigation. It was a war and we had been in the rear of the enemy for eight months. We were in a few holding centers and got stuck in Yelets due to typhoid. In April 1943 we came to a big holding camp in Podolsk near Moscow. We stayed in a barrack. We were interrogated by an investigation officer. We told him about our adventures. They were checking every part of our story thoroughly. After some time I received a certificate confirming that I went through the investigation successfully.

After this investigation was over Zhenia and I got a short leave. We went to my parents in Kuibyshev where they were in evacuation since August 1941. I didn't recognize my father and mother at the railway station in Kuibyshev so old they had grown. They spent eight months without having any information about me.

In October 1943 Zhenia and I got an assignment to the NKVD [21](#) authorities. I was sent to Kizil, in Perm region, to a camp for German, Romanian, Italian, Czech and Hungarian prisoners-of-war. I was appointed as chief of the sanitary unit. Zhenia was with me. We were responsible for their health condition, meals. It was so very hard to communicate with former enemies after all we saw at the front and in encirclement. We submitted reports that we were in encirclement and captivity and just couldn't work with prisoners-of-war. It lasted half a year.

At the beginning of April 1944 we were sent to the Crimea: our sanitary unit and the entire management of the camp. We were to arrange camps for prisoners-of-war. Zhenia and I kept submitting our requests to be transferred to the frontline forces. In August 1944 we received an order from Moscow dismissing us from the NKVD. We were sent to the evacuation hospital in Odessa.

I called my parents when Zhenia and I received an assignment in the Crimea. We went from Simferopol to Odessa together with my parents. On the way my mother got typhoid all of a sudden. She was in a very poor condition when we arrived in Odessa. She was taken to the hospital and my father and I settled at our acquaintances, since our apartment was occupied by someone else. This happened at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I was staying with Mother every moment. My father kept praying.

My mother died in the night of 3rd October, on the third day of Sukkot. We buried Mother in a common cemetery since there were no burials allowed in the Jewish cemetery in 1944. My father, I, Zhenia and Munia's friend were at the funeral. For seven days after my mother died my father sat shivah on the floor. He was desolate and never overcame this despair. He passed away in June 1945. My parents had lived together for over forty years. They had a difficult life. They were devoted to one another and loved my brother and me dearly.

## After the war

The government issued a decree according to which those that were demobilized from the army had a right to get accommodation in the apartments from where they had gone to the front. The tenants of our apartment were a colonel, the Head of Staff of the Navy, and his wife. The town administration found another apartment for them. Of course, it took me some time to obtain all necessary approvals but finally I moved into our apartment.

I worked at the evacuation hospital in the former Lermontov Recreation Center. There were Soviet officers and the American, French and English military. They got treatment in the hospital before they were sent back on ships to their countries. There were American, French and English missions to support these military. They brought them chocolate and cigarettes. Madam Churchill, the wife of the British Prime Minister, visited our hospital to talk with her compatriots. She was accompanied by a number of officials and representatives of the Soviet commandment. [Editor's note: Clementine Churchill (1885-1977), the wife of Sir Winston Churchill, was Chairman of the Red Cross Aid to Russia Fund in 1941-1946. In 1945 she visited the Soviet Union.]

I met my future husband, David Teplitskiy, in the hospital. We got married in December 1945, and had our marriage registered at a civilian registry office. David was born in Kharkov in 1913. He was Jewish. His parents, Esiah and Revekka, were communists. His mother took part in the revolution of 1917. He finished Rabfak and entered the Industrial Institute at the Kharkov Tractor Plant. After finishing his fourth year at the Institute he fell ill; there was something wrong with his lungs. His parents sent him to Moscow where he had an aunt who was a party official. He was cured and stayed with his aunt.

David was a member of the Communist Party and in 1933 he was appointed to be the chairman of the collective farm [22](#) in Kolomna near Moscow. He was 20 years old then. Sometime afterward he returned to Kharkov to continue his studies and work at the Tractor Plant. Upon graduation from the institute he was sent to work as electrician at a construction site in the Crimea.

In 1936 he was recruited to the army. He finished a school of communications operators in the army and served in a communications unit. He went to the front from Batumi. He served at a rifle regiment and was the deputy political chief of the regiment. He was shell-shocked in Bulgaria in 1945. During this time David's father died in evacuation in 1944 and his mother died in February 1946. David demobilized from the army in the rank of major in 1946. He was awarded orders and medals.

David became the chief power engineer at a wine trust in Odessa. He was the heart of any company and a very nice and smart man. All our friends and acquaintances loved him.

My friend Zhenia married a Jewish man from Riga in the 1950s. They lived in Latvia. Zhenia gave birth to a daughter. In the 1970s their family moved to Israel. Regretfully, our correspondence faded out gradually.

My brother Munia was at the front throughout the war. He was an artillery man. He was in Bulgaria when the war was over. He demobilized in the rank of captain in 1946 and returned to Odessa. He also settled down in this apartment. My brother became a plumbing engineer at a construction agency. He got married in 1954. His wife Raissa was a lung doctor. In 1958 his son Leonid was

born. In 1965 he received an apartment and he and his family moved to Cheryomushki, a new neighborhood in the town. His son graduated from the Polytechnic Institute and he is an engineer.

In 1974 when Leonid was receiving his passport my brother changed his name from Haim to Michael for his son to have a more common patronymic. [Editor's note: In the USSR state and everyday anti-Semitism re-emerged in 1953. The patronymic of Haimovich was a typical Jewish one and was associated with 'Haim' that was a central character of anti-Semitic anecdotes.] My brother died in 1993 and his wife died in 2000.

In 1946 the hospital where I worked was closed and I went to work in the orthopedic and traumatology department of the Lermontov Recreation Center as a surgeon. I studied therapy at a short-term course at the Institute of Resort Science. I became a physician in 1950 and went to work at the cardiologic recreation center that was later named Russia. I worked at the Russia Health Center from 1950 until the end of 1992, that is, 42 years, except for a few months during the period of the Doctors' Plot [23](#) in 1952.

There were few very skilled Jewish doctors in Odessa's department of health. The authorities decided to remove them from their high official positions and appointed them to work at our health center. Since there were no vacancies, our chief doctor, a Jew, decided to transfer me to the tuberculosis clinic. The reason was that I came to work later than any other employees.

According to the law they were supposed to offer me a job that was my specialization. However, I never worked in the field of tuberculosis and so I went to court. But I had to go to work before the court made a decision. I took up my new job, but in a few months I returned to my previous work.

The Doctors' Plot stopped after Stalin died in 1953. I was grieving after Stalin. It was a tragedy for our family. Our country won the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II under the rule of Stalin. We didn't know what the future was going to bring. Everyone we knew was in grief.

My daughter Reeda was born on 14th February 1947. My second daughter Lora was born on 6th November 1954. The girls were much loved. I did my best to make our home cozy and warm, like it was when my mother was alive. We celebrated all birthdays and holidays. We mainly celebrated the Soviet holidays. Our most cherished holiday was 9th May, Victory Day [24](#). On this occasion, for several years I went to Lozovaya station [Kharkov region] where veterans of our division, who liberated Lozovaya station in April 1942, got together. Pioneers of the local school found us and the authorities invited us to visit them.

At Pesach we always had matzah; we bought it at the synagogue in Peresyp [an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. Our children knew they were Jewish. We were teaching them to be honest, kind and hardworking. Our daughters studied in a Soviet school and had Jewish and Russian friends. There was no anti-Semitism in our surroundings and my daughters didn't face any at school: Odessa has always been an international city.

Our family was well-to-do by Soviet standards: we had a four-room apartment in the center of the town, a TV set, a fridge and other electrical appliances. My girls and I were always beautifully dressed. In summer we had a rest at the Russia recreation center.

My older daughter Reeda entered a machine tool college after finishing the eighth grade at school in 1962. Upon graduation she worked at the design office of a radial unit plant. In a few years she

entered an evening department of the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Odessa University. There were already restrictions for Jews to enter higher educational institutions. [Editor's note: Unlike in tsarist Russia there was no limited percentage of admission of Jews to higher educational institutions in the USSR, but in reality, beginning from the early 1950s, admission of Jews was significantly restricted and this limitation was authorized by the highest authorities].

At the university Reeda met her future husband, Leo Malin, a Jew. They both were still students when they got married. They registered their marriage at a civilian registration office. Reeda was 22. In October 1970 her son Alexandr or Sasha was born. In a month Alexandr was to have a surgery and my husband also fell ill. Reeda left the university in 1971. In 1978 she got rheumatic arthritis and had a few surgeries. Regretfully she became an invalid of grade I in 1985. My son-in-law, Leo Malin, graduated from the university in 1974 and worked as programmer.

My grandson Alexandr studied at the university and worked at the youth department of Sochnut. In 1992 Sochnut sent him to Israel for one month for excursion. Since graduation from university he works as a lawyer for a private company. He married a Jewish girl in 1993, now they are divorced. My great-grandson Mark Malin studies at the Jewish school in Odessa.

In 1970 my husband had a severe stroke: he was paralyzed. He lost his speaking ability and memory. He didn't speak and couldn't remember one word. But God saved him. I did all I could to return him to life. I taught him to speak and walk. Gradually he came back to normal life. He lived eleven years after that. In 1981 he needed to be operated on prostate adenoma. He passed away on the third day after the surgery. This happened on 14th February 1981. We buried David in the common cemetery near my parents.

My younger daughter Lora finished school in 1972. She was very successful at school and had all the highest grades, but she didn't receive a medal due to her Jewish identity. Lora was very fond of biology at school. She read a lot and dreamed of studying at the Faculty of Biology of Odessa University. At her entrance exam in biology she was plucked openly although she had excellent knowledge of biology. Lora got a job as an attendant at the health center where I worked. In a year she entered the Polytechnic Institute in Kirovograd where it was easier for a Jew to be admitted. Later she got transferred to the Refrigeration Institute in Odessa and graduated in 1978.

Lora married Igor Derrish, a Jew. They had their marriage registered at a civilian registration office in 1978. Igor was an engineer at the refrigeration machines plant. They have a daughter, Valia, who was born in 1979. In 1985 her son Vadim was born. Lora worked as an engineer at the machine department of the technical sales department.

In 1990 Lora and her family moved to Israel. They live in Netanya. Lora works at the import department of the Delta film company. My granddaughter Valia served in the army and studies at the university in Tel Aviv. She will be a linguist. My grandson Vadim studies in the twelfth grade.

I visited them three times. Israel is a fabulous country – so beautiful, but I don't want to live there. I hope for the best for this country. We follow all events in Israel. I am so scared of terrorist attacks. I am in fear for the life of my close ones. Lora sends me e-mails every day that they are doing all right there.



The Jewish organizations Sochnut and Joint [26](#) started restoration of the Jewish life in Odessa. I receive Jewish newspapers like Or Sameakh and Shomrei Shabos. The Jewish Charity Center Gmilus Hesed [27](#), established in 1992, has supported our family a lot – they care about people and always offer assistance. They provided a wheel chair and a special mattress to my daughter Reeda. Employees of Gmilus Hesed treat me with great respect and invite me to their events. I received a hearing device from them. I am an invalid of grade II of the Great Patriotic War; I have orders and medals: a medal for combat accomplishments, for encirclement and being wounded and an Order of the Great Patriotic War [28](#) of the second class.

After my parents died, I went to the synagogue at Yom Kippur, when they recite Izkor. [Izkor is the prayer of commemoration at Yom Kippur.] After the war, between 1945 and 1946, I went to the synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street. Later, when it was closed, I went to one in Peresyp. I go there every year and make a list of my deceased relatives – 15 of them were lost to the war. Now, once a year I go to the synagogue in Evreyskaya Street. I've never believed in God, but I've always lived according to Jewish traditions. I have wonderful daughters, sons-in-law and three beloved grandchildren. They remember that they are Jews and they know the history and traditions of their people.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

### **[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](#) Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution the National Assembly of Moldavians convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldavian state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldavian capital in January 1918. Upon Moldavia's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania (April 9, 1918).

### **[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 Hitler's rise to power**

In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates. The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

## **6 People's volunteer corps**

Local military formation during the Great Patriotic War, took part in defense of cities, included civil population of different ages.

## **7 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)**

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including War and Peace, Anna Karenina and The Death of Ivan Ilyich, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as Sevastopol Sketches, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

## **8 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.

## **9 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

## **10 All-Union pioneer organization**

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

## **11 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

## **12 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.

## **13 Rabfak**

Rabfak is an abbreviation for 'Rabotnicheski Fakultet' meaning Workers' Faculty. They were much popular in the 1970s and 1980s. They were organized with the cooperation of the Bulgarian Communist Party and their main goal was to prepare specialists to enroll in universities. The people

were mostly from industrial companies. The courses lasted a number of months and people did not go to work while they were studying. The people sent to such courses had a good professional background and were recommended by party representatives. In socialist times such workers' schools were organized throughout the entire Eastern Block. Modes of instruction included both evening and correspondence classes and all educational levels were served - from elementary school to higher education.

#### **14 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.

#### **15 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.

#### **16 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

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

#### **17 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)**

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

#### **18 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917,

although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

### **19 Five percent quota**

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

### **20 Stalingrad Battle**

17th July 1942 - 2nd February 1943. The South-Western and Don Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19th and 20th November 1942 the Soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330,000 people) and eliminated them. On 31st January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91,000 people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

### **21 NKVD**

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

### **22 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.

### **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 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.

## **25 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)**

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.

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

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

## **27 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 Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed 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 Hesed 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 Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

## **28 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.