Mozes Katz

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Khust
Ukraine
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
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Mozes Katz and his wife live in a private cottage in the center of the picturesque Subcarpathian town of Khust. There are many flowers growing in front of the house. It's his wife Vera's flower garden. The yard is twined round with grapevines with sweet smelling grape bunches hanging from them. There are two rooms and a kitchen in the house. They have furniture bought in the 1960s. There are photographs of their sons and grandchildren on the walls. Mozes is a stout stocky short man. He has big hands used to hard work. He wears a cap even at home. He cannot imagine not covering his head. He speaks Ruthenian, the language of the Subcarpathians. He is a taciturn man and speaks slowly, forcibly. He has a severe expression on his face. I only saw a smile on his face when his two granddaughters, the daughters of his younger son, came by.

Jewish Community in Pre-War Korolevo

At least two generations of my family on my mother and my father's side were born and lived in the village of Korolevo, Khust district [630 km from Kiev, 92 km from Uzhgorod] in Subcarpathia 1.

My paternal grandfather, Itzyk Katz, was born in the 1870s. I don't know anything about my grandfather's family. Perhaps, they left the village looking for a better life or probably they died before I was born. My grandmother Etia was also born in Korolevo in the early 1880s. I don't know anything about my grandmother's family and I don't know her maiden name either.

My grandfather was a wagon driver. He had two pairs of horses and two wagons. He didn't earn much, but he managed to support his big family. My grandmother didn't work like many married women at that time.

Korolevo was a big village. Over half of its population was Jewish. There were over 80 married men in the village and each family had many children. My grandfather's family was no exception.

There were two synagogues: one for wealthier and another one for poorer Jews. My father told me that when there was one synagogue there were often conflicts between the poor who reproached wealthier Jews for their well-being and the wealthier Jews fought back. Finally wealthier families built a synagogue on the opposite bank of the Tisa River. This happened before I was born. Both synagogues were big two-storied buildings. In towns there were synagogues for Hasidim 2 and Orthodox Jews 3, but there were no Orthodox Jews in our village.

Jews in Korolevo dealt in crafts and commerce. Every family had gardens. About 20 percent of the Jewish families were wealthy and the rest of them were poor.

The entire Jewish population in Korolevo was religious. They observed Jewish traditions. They observed Saturday and went to the synagogue on all Jewish holidays and one couldn't even imagine anything different. The whole village celebrated Saturday and holidays. All shops and stores were closed on Saturday.

All Jews followed the kashrut. There were a few shochetim. Jews mainly ate poultry and if a calf or a cow was slaughtered they were only allowed to eat its front part. Hind quarters were sold to non-kosher butchers. [Editor's note: Certain parts of permitted animals may not be eaten according to Jewish laws. The sciatic nerve and its adjoining blood vessels in hind quarters may not be eaten. Kosher butchers remove this.] It was very strict.

There was a rabbi in each synagogue and there was one chief rabbi for two or three villages. He resolved disputes between neighbors and any other vital issues in a village. For example, if somebody chose a spot to build a house, but there was a tree growing on it they had to obtain a rabbi's permission to cut the tree. So, there were laws and everybody had to comply with them.

All women had their hair cut after they got married and they wore wigs. Men always had their heads capped. They wore caps or hats outside and at home they put on a kippah. They even slept in a yarmulka. Nobody dared to go out with no hat on. Men and women wore common clothes.

Jews spoke Yiddish with each other and communicated with non-Jews in the local dialect, the so-called Ruthenian: a mixture of Ukrainian, Hungarian, German and Czech. [Editor's note: Ruthenian is regarded by some as a Ukrainian dialect and by others a separate Slavic language. As a result of centuries of coexistence it has extensively borrowed from the neighboring languages the interviewee mentioned; probably less from Czech and much more from Slovak.]

There was no anti-Semitism in Subcarpathia before World War II. There was a Romanian, Magyar, Czech [Slovak], Ukrainian and Jewish population in Khust district and there were no conflicts between them. Neighbors supported each other and there was no national segregation during the Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak or Hungarian rule.

Family Background

My grandfather had a house like everybody else. They built houses from airbricks: finely cut wheat and rye straw mixed with clay from which bricks were made and dried in the sun. Most villagers in Subcarpathia built their houses from airbricks; only the wealthiest could afford bricks. My grandfather had a house made of airbricks.

The front door led to a small hallway. There were doors leading to the rooms from the hallway and a big kitchen in the center of the house. There was a Russian stove 4 in the kitchen. It served for cooking and heating of one room and the other room was heated with a small stove. We stoked the stoves with wood and brushwood.

There was a well in the yard. There were sheds, stables and a chicken house in the backyard. There was also a small orchard and a vegetable garden behind the house. My grandfather also owned a plot of land in the field where the family grew potatoes, corn, beans and other vegetables. The crops were kept in the cellar during winter. The daughters were helping Grandmother to do field and house work.

Grandmother and grandfather had eleven children: four daughters and seven sons. I don't remember when they were born. I only remember my father and the youngest brother Moishe's years of birth. The children were born with an interval of one to one-and-a-half years. My father's sister Rivka was the oldest in the family. My father Usher, born in 1905, was the next in the family. Then came two brothers, Iosif and Leiba, daughter Dvoira and the sons Shapsa and David. The next children were daughters Surah and Baila and sons Shmil and Moishe. Moishe was born in 1924. He was only two years older than I.

My father and his brothers studied in cheder. There were three cheders in Korolevo. The girls didn't go to cheder. Wealthier parents hired a teacher for their daughters and they studied at home. Daughters in poor families didn't get any education. They studied prayers by heart and learned to be a good housewife, wife and mother.

After sons had their bar mitzvah at the age of 13 they began their professional training. They became apprentices or their fathers taught them their profession. My grandfather Itzyk taught his sons his profession of a wagon driver. My father and his brothers became wagon drivers. They owned wagons and horses.

Some 30 kilometers from Korolevo was the village of Nizhniy Bystryy [610 km from Kiev, 100 km from Uzhhorod]. There was a big power saw bench in this village owned by Polish masters. They had a license for woodcutting and delivered their product to the railway station in Khust. In Khust wood was loaded on freight trains and transported to Danzig in Poland. Grandfather Itzyk, my father and his brothers worked at this facility. It was hard work, but they were glad they had it.

My father's older sister Rivka married a man from a neighboring village and went to live with him. Dvoira was also married and lived in Korolevo with her husband. Her husband was a shochet in

Korolevo.

The other brothers and sisters were married and lived with their parents. Surah became a dressmaker's apprentice and after finishing her studies she began to earn her living with making clothes. Surah had many clients and earned a good living. Baila helped Grandmother about the house.

My mother's parents also came from Korolevo. Grandfather Laizer Lazarovich was born in the 1870s. I think that grandmother Etia was the same age as he. I don't know my grandmother's maiden name and never saw any of her relatives. Their house was in the same street as Grandfather Itzyk's house and looked the same.

Grandfather Laizer had a binding shop that occupied a room in his house. He worked alone. When he had no orders he went out to other villages looking for work. Grandmother Etia was a housewife. Grandfather Laizer owned more land than my father's parents and my mother's family was wealthier than my father's. My mother's parents were religious. They celebrated Saturday and Jewish holidays and observed all Jewish traditions. They spoke only Yiddish at home.

There were four children in the family. My mother's sister Rivka was the oldest in the family. My mother Hendl was the second child in the family. She was born in 1904. The third child was Nachman and the last child was my mother's sister whose name I don't remember.

Aunt Rivka was the first one to get married. Her husband Yanovich was a tailor and Rivka was a housewife. They lived in Korolevo. Nachman became a shochet. Nachman and his family and my mother also lived in Korolevo after getting married, and my mother's younger sister moved to the town of Krichevo in Subcarpathia [610 km from Kiev, 115 km from Uzhhorod] after getting married.

Rivka was the only survivor in World War II, the rest of them perished. The Germans took the younger sister and her family to Ivano-Frankovsk in 1941 and exterminated them there, while my mother and Nachman and his family perished in concentration camps.

My parents knew each other since childhood. They lived in the same street. When they grew up they decided to get married. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a rabbi and a chuppah. I think they got married in 1924 or at the beginning of 1925. At that time this was the only possible way of getting married. I don't know if they had a civilian marriage too. At that time many Jewish families in Subcarpathia had a traditional wedding and a marriage registry note in the synagogue register.

Before their wedding my mother's mother was given the name of Bruche-Etia since it wasn't allowed for two grandmothers to have the same names. There was a superstition that if both mothers or a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law had the same name then God would call the older one to his service.

Both grandfathers made their contributions to help a newly formed family make a start: my paternal grandfather Itzyk gave them 400 square meters of land near his house to build a house and my maternal grandfather Laizer gave them a plot of land in his field.

My father began to build a house for his family from airbricks. He made a foundation for a big house, but he only managed to complete the construction of the hallway, two rooms and a kitchen

before World War II. My father made a big hallway with a folding roof for a sukkah.

My mother wore a wig after she got married. My father didn't have a beard or payes. He only had a moustache. Jewish men were not allowed to shave with a steel razor and my father had special depilatory cream. He applied this cream on his face and then scraped it off with a wooden spatula.

Growing Up

There were seven children in the family. I was the first child and was born on 25th December 1925, but the year of birth specified in my birth certificate was 1926. My Jewish name is Moishe, but in my Czechoslovak birth certificate it is Mozes and I have always been called by this name. My sister Ghitlia was born in 1927, but was registered as born in 1929 in her documents.

The notary lived in another village and parents didn't usually have time to visit him right after childbirth. For this reason my birth was registered a year later. Then my mother did it differently. She didn't go to register a baby after it was born, but waited until the next baby and registered both babies as twins. Therefore, according to family documents, we have three pairs of twins in the family.

After Ghitlia, Laicha was born in 1929, then Baila, then son Yuman and then two daughters: Yenta and Surah. Baila and Yuman were registered in 1932, and Yenta and Surah in 1935.

My father worked at the power saw bench as a wagon driver. My father made three trips per week to Khust. One day he loaded wood onto his wagon in Nizhniy Bystryy and unloaded it in Khust on the following day. He spent the payment for the first trip to buy oats for his horses. They worked for the family and my father watched it strictly that they got enough food. My father spent the payment for the second trip to buy hay for the horses and the third payment was for the family needs.

When my older sister and I grew big enough my mother sent us to cow owners. We had buckets and the housewives milked their cows using our buckets. Not all of them were Jewish families and my mother preferred to have them use our containers to keep this milk kosher. I went to one end of the village and my sister went to the other. We brought the milk home and my mother made sour cream, butter, custard and cheese from it.

Twice a week my mother took her dairy products in two baskets to Khust where she had her Jewish clients. She walked 8 kilometers to Khust and 8 kilometers back home with heavy loads. For the money her clients paid my mother paid for the milk and bought us bagels in Khust. We were so happy about them! Our parents spent the money they earned to buy food for the family and horses.

We grew potatoes, corn and beans in the field that my mother had received as dowry from my grandfather. We all worked a lot in the field. I was the oldest son and helped my mother a lot. My mother carried the youngest child wrapped in a blanket to the field and the other children carried spades and hoes.

My mother lay the youngest child down in the bushes and worked with us. When the child cried my mother ran to change diapers and feed the baby and returned to work. We worked until dark and then returned home. We all knew that what we harvested would be our food for the winter. This

was the way we lived: we didn't starve, but we only had sufficient to live on.

My parents were religious and were raising their children religiously. We followed the kashrut never mixing meat and dairy products. We only bought meat from the shochet. My mother made bread for a week. I can still remember the taste of this corn bread of my childhood. When we ran out of corns we bought more and had them ground at a water mill owned by Jews. We also made mamaliga [corn squash, Romanian national food].

It was always warm in the kitchen. As I mentioned before, there was a Russian stove stoked with wood. It served for cooking and heating. There were small iron cast stoves in the rooms. My mother stoked them with wood when it was time for us to go to bed. The stoves cooled down quickly, but we felt warm under our down blankets. Sometimes we heated a brick in the stove and put in into bed to make it warm.

My mother also kept potatoes in the kitchen so that they didn't freeze. There were severe winters. The temperature dropped to minus 30 degrees so that even sparrows fell dead in their flight.

On Friday morning my mother made dough for challah. She baked challot in the stove and then put pots with chulent for Saturday into the oven. The door of the oven was sealed with clay and the food was left in it overnight. It wasn't allowed to cook or heat food on Saturday. On Friday evening my mother lit candles and prayed over them. My father blessed the food and we sat down to dinner.

My mother tried to make more delicious food for Saturday. When we returned from the synagogue on Saturday my mother took the pots with food out of the stove. My father recited a prayer and we sat down to a meal.

My mother didn't light a kerosene lamp or stoke a stove on Saturday. Our Ukrainian neighbor came to do this work. My parents gave her a piece of challah or some change for this work. We weren't even allowed to fetch water from the well on Saturday. We took the horses to grandfather Itzyk's well in the yard. They drank water from the well.

We celebrated all Jewish holidays at home like any other Jewish family in Korolevo. Women made matzah for Pesach. Preparation for this holiday began when Jews rented a mill and washed and cleaned it to remove any chametz. Then a rabbi came to inspect the mill and give his permission for baking matzah. Then Jews bought high quality wheat and ground it.

There were two or three bigger houses where they had two stoves in the kitchen. People got together there to make matzah. Women made dough and rolled it and men placed it into the ovens. It usually lasted a few days: there was to be a sufficient quantity of matzah to last throughout the eight days of the holiday. Matzah at that time was different. It was baked from the flour of coarse grinding. There were round-shaped pieces of matzah. They were dark.

Each family had special crockery for Pesach. When there were more utensils needed they made a fire in the vegetable field, placed a big bowl where they put everyday utensils cleaned and washed in advance. They also placed hot stones for better boiling inside the bowls. Even in the poorest families they tried to have gefilte fish, chicken broth and goose meat and fat on this holiday.

We kept geese and chickens. We had geese slaughtered in fall. My mother sold goose liver in Khust: it was a delicacy and cost a lot. At times there was some liver left and mother cooked it for the children. My mother kept salted meat in a barrel in the hallway. Every Friday my mother took some meat to make chulent for Saturday.

On Pesach my mother also made chulent with goose. My mother kept goose fat in special utensils to keep it kosher. My mother fried keyzls, potato pancakes fried in goose fat, chicken broth with matzah dumplings, boiled chicken, gefilte fish and carrot tsimes. My mother didn't make any pastries for Pesach: it wasn't allowed to bake with ordinary flour and we couldn't make matzah flour since our matzah was too rough.

In the morning of the first day of Pesach all Jews went to the synagogue. In the evening the first seder began. The table was set and the front door was kept open for Elijah the Prophet. My father sat at the head of the table wearing his white clothes. Men wear such clothing on Pesach and Yom Kippur.

I asked my father the four questions: why we eat reclining on this night, why we only eat matzah, but no bread, why we eat bitter greeneries on this night and why we drink four glasses of wine on this night. I posed my questions in Hebrew and my father answered them in Hebrew. Then my father read the Torah and we listened attentively.

We all, even the youngest children, stayed until the end of seder. Children had small glasses and they sipped from their glasses and had them refilled after a sip. The last glass was to be drunken bottom up. There was a big glass for Elijah in the center of the table. We sang songs between prayers.

At Rosh Hashanah we all went to the synagogue. There were apples and honey on the table on this day. We dipped apples in honey and ate them.

At Yom Kippur all adults fasted. Young children didn't fast, When they turned eight they began to fast for half a day and beginning from the age of twelve they fasted a whole day like adults.

The kapores ritual was conducted in each Jewish family before the holiday. Women and girls did it with a white chicken and men and boys with a white rooster. The chicken was to be turned over one's head and the words 'May you be my atonement' had to be pronounced.

The night before we had a substantial dinner and then a day's fasting began. On the following day adults and children prayed at the synagogue a whole day until the first evening star appeared in the sky and then the fasting was over and they went back home to have dinner.

Every year a sukkah was built. Some made a sukkah in their yard. My father made a folding roof in the hallway. We unfolded it at Sukkot and placed canes on the grid. We, children, made decorations for the sukkah and decorated it with ribbons and flowers. My mother placed a table in the sukkah and we prayed and had meals there.

At Chanukkah my mother lit a candle on each day of the holiday. We were poor and didn't have a chanukkiyah. We made candles from a potato. We removed the inside, poured oil into it, placed a wick in it and lit it. Our relatives visited us and gave children Chanukkah gelt. It wasn't much since all people were poor.

At Purim all Jews went to the synagogue in the morning. After that all were engaged in sending shelakhmones to their dear ones. Children ran around with trays of treats. My mother always made pastries at Purim: the family was big and there had to be enough treats for everyone. I believe this was the only day in the year when we had enough sweets. Then children went to Jewish houses to give Purimshpil performances getting sweets or small change for their performances.

There was another celebration when all residents of Korolevo got together: a Jewish wedding. I remember such occasions. If a bridegroom came from another village all boys and young men went to meet him on the outskirts of the village. They grabbed the bridegroom and wouldn't let him go until the bride's family paid ransom, which was usually a three-liter bottle of vodka. Then the bridegroom and other men went to one of the bride's relatives where they had a party eating, drinking and singing.

The bride stayed at home. In the morning she went to the mikveh where other women washed her. They cut her hair and then the bride and her friends went to her home to dress her in her wedding gown and adorn her with flowers. Then the bride's mother and the bridegroom's mother appeared to take the bride to the chuppah.

A chuppah was usually installed in the yard. A chuppah consists of four posts and a cover spread on top of them. In Korolyovo the chuppah was made in the following way: there was a tallit spread on four posts and a carpet on the ground. The bride came to the chuppah and the bride's father and the bridegroom's father brought the bridegroom. A rabbi or chazzan conducted the wedding ceremony. Then he gave the bridegroom and bride to sip from a glass of wine and then they stepped on this glass and broke it. This was the end of the ceremony.

Weddings were usually arranged on Fridays. There was a chuppah on Friday, and a wedding party and dancing on Saturday. There was only kosher food at weddings. Actually, the majority of Jewish families in Korolyovo always had kosher food and not only on holidays or at weddings. The eating lasted until the first star, the end of Sabbath and then there was dancing.

The first dance with the bride was with her husband, the next – with the rabbi and then – most honored guests. However, nobody but her husband, not even the rabbi, was allowed to hold the bride by her hand. They danced holding the ends of a handkerchief. Guests also danced: girls with girls and boys with boys. There were drinks served, but the guests knew their limit and didn't drink too much.

I went to cheder like all other boys in Korolevo. We went to cheder at the age of six and also went to an elementary school at this age. I went to a Ukrainian school. Classes at school began at nine o'clock in the morning. Cheder started at 6am. At 8am our melamed let us go home for breakfast and then we ran to school. We came back from school to have lunch at home at 2pm and then we went to cheder again. We came home when it got dark.

We studied the Torah and Hebrew at cheder. We read the Torah in Hebrew and translated it into Yiddish. Our teachers knew how busy we were at cheder and tried to give us no homework. My sisters and younger brother also went to this school. There were Jewish, Magyar, Czech and Ukrainian children in school. I never noticed any anti-Semitism. There was no anti-Semitism during the Czech rule.

I studied at school and in cheder until the age of 13. At 13 I had my bar mitzvah. When I turned 13, on the first Saturday I was called to the Torah in the synagogue. I had the first suit in my life made for this occasion. The melamed prepared a section of the Torah with me. I read this article and recited a prayer. This was all. There was no meal or celebration of any kind. We never celebrated birthdays either. I've lived 77 years of my life with not a single birthday celebration. It wasn't a custom with us.

During the War

In March 1939 the Hungarians came to power. [Editor's note: Hungarian troops entered Subcarpathia in March 1939.] Adults remembered that life was good during the Austro-Hungarian period, but this time Hungary was a German ally and the Germans dictated to Hungarians. Soon people began to face anti-Semitism. Gendarmes could come to any house demanding money or even beating its owners. It didn't happen often, but there were such demonstrations.

Life became more difficult. Hungarian authorities issued food coupons for all residents. However, there were no religious persecutions and there was not a single synagogue closed before the Soviet power was established in 1945. Even the Germans didn't destroy a single synagogue.

Later Jews were forbidden to keep shops or stores in their ownership. They were to be either transferred to new owners or to the state. We were poor and it had no impact on us. However, my father had to give one horse for the needs of the front, but they returned it a few months later.

In summer 1939 my grandfather Itzyk, my father's father, died. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Korolevo according to the Jewish traditions. All Jews and a rabbi from the synagogue that my grandfather attended came to his funeral. My father recited the Kaddish. My grandmother Etia sat shivah. Other women couldn't join her since the rules required to not work for a whole week and they had to do their work.

In late fall 1940 grandmother Bruche-Etia, my mother's mother, died. She also had a Jewish funeral. My grandfather and grandmother's gravestones have been preserved. Only some letters on them have crumbled, but the gravestones are still there.

In 1939 the war in Poland began 5. Polish refugees came to Khust and its outskirts. There were no Jews among them. They were Polish Christians. We didn't know that Germans exterminated Jews in Poland: there were no newspapers or radio in villages. However, there was some information.

In 1940 many Subcarpathian residents, including Jews, escaped to the USSR hoping for a happier life, but it happened otherwise. Frontier men captured them on the border and sent them to the north, to the Gulag 6 where inmates were dying of hunger, cold and diseases and hard work in unbearable conditions. There were hardly any survivors.

In 1941 my father was taken to a Hungarian labor battalion 7. At that time Jews could only serve in such work battalions. After my father left I had to quit my studies to help my mother to support the family. My father reached an agreement with an old Jew that he would replace him at the power saw bench and that my mother would pay him. Early in the morning my mother and I harnessed the horses waiting for this old man to come. He came for two weeks and then one day he didn't come.

One day my mother and I waited for him the whole morning, but he never showed up. My mother wanted to unharness the horses and take them back to the stables. She wanted me to go and find out why the old man hadn't come. I had helped my father with his work before and I told my mother that I could do this work.

This was my first day at work. I tried to come to the power saw bench early in the morning. The sooner I came the sooner I received my load of wood. A foreman took me to a pile of wood and told me how many logs I could take. There were no loaders. I had to carry 2.5 cubic meters of beech wood from the pile to my wagon at the distance of 25-30 meters. There I had to load them properly.

The distance to Korolevo was about 30 kilometers. On my way back I walked beside the wagon. I was holding the horses by the bridle. Of course, it would have been easier for me to hold the pole, but I was too short and wouldn't have been able to hold the horses in this manner. When we moved along the road it was all right, but then we had to cross a narrow gauge rail track a few times where the horses jibbed.

I took the load to the village of Iza, some 5 kilometers from Korolevo, left the wagon there and took the horses home. We returned home at 2-3 o'clock in the morning. My mother gave me food and went to the stables to unharness and feed the horses.

I got up very early the next morning since I had to go to Iza and take the load to Khust. There was also a line in Khust to unload the wood onto a railcar or storage facility according to directions. Life was hard I'd say, but we enjoyed it since we could celebrate Saturday and holidays and there were no bans on religion.

In June 1941 Germany attacked the USSR [cf. Great Patriotic War] 8. When the Germans came to Ivano-Frankovsk region mass extermination of Jews began. We had no information about it then. We only got to know about it after World War II.

The Germans began random selection of Jews. They left Grandfather Laizer behind, at home, but they took our whole family. We got on a train that took us to Yasen at the border with the USSR. The train stopped and we saw Jews near the tents in a forest near the border. From there they were taken to Ivano-Frankosk region.

We were ordered to get off the train and line up in rows of five people in front of carriages. We were kept there for two hours before there was an order to get back in the train. We returned to Khust. We were lucky since this was the only train that returned. We returned home.

Only after World War II we got to know how lucky we were and what was waiting for us had we been taken to the Soviet territory. Germans shot and tortured Jews. The family of my mother's younger sister was not so lucky. They were taken to Ivano-Frankovsk region from Krichev. They all perished there.

My father served in his labor battalion until 1943. He fell ill with rheumatism in 1943 and was released. After he returned home my father resumed his work at the power saw bench. I began to help my mother at home and in the field. I fetched water, cut wood and took the geese to a pasture.

Early in the morning my mother went to the meadow to pick grass for the geese. My mother came back home soaked with dew and with her hands swollen. Of course, my mother had the most difficult life. She had to do everything and there were no household appliances to make her life easier. Women did their laundry in a hole in the ice in the river.

Ghettoization

In April 1944 Jewish residents of Korolevo were taken to the ghetto. Gendarmes came to Jewish houses instructing Jewish families to take only necessary things and food for a few days with them. A gendarmerie truck transported Jews to the ghetto in Iza. Christian families in three streets of Iza closer to the river were ordered to move out and go to live with their relatives or acquaintances and Jewish newcomers were accommodated in those houses. Jews were brought to the ghetto from all surrounding villages. We heard that there was a ghetto in Khust and other locations in Subcarpathia.

We were accommodated in a small house that had formerly belonged to one person. There were now 15 of us in this small room: there was our family of nine people, my paternal grandmother Etia, my father's younger brothers Shmil and Moishe and single sisters Surah and Baila and my paternal grandfather Laizer. We slept on the floor. My mother's sister Rivka and her family were accommodated nearby.

We were allowed to move around within the ghetto, but we were not allowed to leave its grounds. We had taken some food from home: potatoes, beans and flour, but we ran out of stocks promptly and I began to go to fetch food from home. I got out of the ghetto at night, crossed the river and went into the house. I knew how to open a window from outside. I got beans, flour, cereals, whatever there was and went back to the ghetto. Of course, it was risky since the ghetto was guarded by gendarmes.

When we were in the ghetto Pesach began. Any celebrations were out of the question, but we managed to mark the holiday. Men got together for a minyan. We didn't have matzah, but we didn't eat bread either. We ate potatoes and beans: these products were allowed on Pesach.

My maternal grandfather Laizer died in the ghetto. This happened the next day after the end of Pesach. We asked gendarmes to allow us bury Grandfather in the Jewish cemetery in Korolevo. It was possible to walk across the river: it was knee deep. They didn't allow us to take him there. They ordered us to bury him in the Jewish section of the cemetery in Iza. They also let two men from the ghetto help us bury my grandfather. My father recited the Kaddish over his grave.

We couldn't have a gravestone installed at that time, and now we have lost the grounds where he was buried. Time destroyed all signs. People even stole stones from the cemetery. People in Iza are no good, which is different in Korolevo. After World War II stones were stolen from the cemetery to build foundations for houses or they were dropped in the swamp to enable traffic to move. Now when I come to Iza on the day my grandfather died I light a candle on any spot.

We stayed three weeks in the ghetto. One day gendarmes ordered Jews to take their belongings and come outside. All were taken to a Christian church that had been burned and had no roof left. It rained all night and we got wet and cold. In the morning we were taken on horse and bull-drawn wagons to a brick factory in Khust.

Germans and Hungarian gendarmes tortured Jews, particularly Jewish men. They pulled them by their beards, shaved a cross on their heads, beat and demanded money and gold from them. They probably had informers telling them who had gold.

Auschwitz

Two days passed and then they pulled a train to the brick factory and ordered us to get in. There was a toilet hole made in the floor of our railcar. We were to go to the toilet before everybody's eyes. The doors were closed and fixed with barbed wire on the outside. The train headed to Auschwitz.

I don't remember how long we were on the road. When the train arrived at Auschwitz we were told to leave anything we had in the train. We could see prisoners in striped clothing. At the order of the Germans a crew of prisoners with hoses and brushes went to wash the train.

There were Germans in white robes standing in a line alongside the train. They determined whether a person could work or not. They sorted us out: young men were to stand in one group and girls and young women were in another group. Mothers were ordered to leave their children with grandmothers to be able to work. Some mothers left their children and others refused. Old men, women and women with children were separated. They got towels and soap and were taken to a bathroom. The Germans closed the door and filled it with gas. We only got to know about it later.

I went with my father, his brother Moishe and my cousin Mendel Yanovich, my mother's sister Rivka's son. We were taken to the bathroom and received towels and soap. When we washed ourselves they shaved our heads and bodies and gave us striped uniforms. We were given numbers.

What was good about this camp was that it was very clean. The Germans watched strictly that all inmates kept themselves very clean. There were no lice and there was no typhoid. Every two to three days there was a medical check-up. They checked clothes for lice and if they found any they took them for treatment with steam and an inmate received another uniform. Later, when I was in the Soviet army I often recalled these check-ups. We didn't have any.

We stayed there for two days. There was a distribution center in the central camp of Auschwitz. It formed crews and sent them out to camps. They sorted out inmates in work camps every month. Each inmate had to take off his clothes. If Germans saw that he was exhausted and thin and couldn't work they sent him to the crematorium in Auschwitz.

We were sent to the work camp in Monovice, a division of Auschwitz. There were 59 barracks for inmates in this camp. At first my father, I, Moishe and Mendel were sent to one barrack. They were big barracks. It's hard to say now how many inmates there were in one barrack: I think about 200, probably. There were two-tier plank beds where we slept. Each inmate had a blanket. However thin it was it was better than nothing.

There were men from all countries under German occupation: France, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Czechoslovakia and others. There were also German inmates that were condemned for some crimes in Germany. There were Germans who had been sent to concentration camps for their anti-fascist activities and there were criminals. English prisoners were in a camp separately from others

in Monovice. English prisoners were allowed to receive parcels from their relatives and the Red Cross and they were sent to do easier work. There was a senior man in each barrack, one of the inmates appointed by the Germans.

In the morning we got some junk coffee with no sugar and then we had to line up. We worked at a mechanic plant, some 2 kilometers from the camp. We lined up in rows of five people and marched with the convoy and music to the plant. At the gate the convoy counted us and they also counted us when we came back in the evening. There was security at the plant: it was surrounded with a high fence and there were armed guards on towers. In the evening our convoy came back to take us to the camp.

We did hard work: we excavated trenches and placed pipes and concrete pieces into trenches. Later we heard that there was a crew of young people at the plant. They were doing easier work. The three of us went to the commander to ask him to include us in this crew. I, Moishe and Mendel were taken into this crew and accommodated in another barrack. We left the camp with all inmates and at the plant we were taken to do our work.

I became an assistant to a German storekeeper who released tools and parts to inmates. I helped him to find all necessary items. My uncle Moishe worked with English prisoners checking equipment. He had a good life there. The English received food parcels and shared food with him. Moishe was better fed than we. Mendel was an assistant to a welder carrying his welding unit and gas cylinders for him.

We had lunch brought to the camp. It usually consisted of some soup made from concentrate with grass. We had lunch in the canteen. Sometimes there were air raids and we were ordered to go to a bunker. We were not allowed to stay in the canteen. How we wished we could stay and eat as much as we could! But God forbid, we couldn’t stay: The Germans shot those who disobeyed their orders immediately.

In the evening the convoy from the camp was waiting for us at the gate of the plant. We were counted again and marched back to the camp with the convoy and music. There were bowls with dinner waiting for us in the barracks and inmates of the camp were lining up to get food. We had dinner in the barrack and went to sleep.

The senior man of our barrack was a German man. He was sentenced for political reasons. He had children in Germany and he patronized the three of us. If there was food left in the bowl he gave it to us.

We didn’t know the days or dates. We didn’t observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. We didn’t even know when they were. Jews didn’t even pray. All we could think about was going to sleep as soon as possible.

It became difficult when the Russian front was approaching. Russian troops began their offensive in January 1945. There were continuous air raids and bombings. We stayed in our barracks all day long. When the front was close a German officer came into our barrack. He said that we might leave the camp since the front was near and the camp was to be evacuated.

Then the Germans were planning to pour gasoline over the barracks and burn them along with any inmates inside. It was evening. The Germans were releasing inmates by barracks: barrack #1, 2,

etc. We were in the third barrack and my father was in barrack 59.

When it was our turn we were ordered to line up in rows of five people. We were given a loaf of bread and a piece of sausage each. We were told to take blankets with us. It was cold outside in January... We ate our sausage and cut bread into slices. We hid our ration of bread under our shirts. We were concerned that stronger adults might take this bread from us. We were convoyed to a road. We had a long way to go.

There were retreating German troops, cavalry and tanks on the road. We were marching in a column. The convoy shot all those who couldn't walk and dumped them into ditches without checking whether they were dead or alive. We were marching and there were people ahead of us and behind us, Jews from concentration camps like us.

Before dawn we were taken to a farmer's yard to rest. The three of us stayed in a shed with cows and chickens. We had a short rest and then started on our way again. We felt very cold, but when we left the town it got even colder. Every day we ate a few slices of bread. This was all the food we had.

We marched that day and the following day and only a day later in the evening we reached the Gleiwitz labor camp 9. The barracks were empty, but there were many more people than could fit in the barracks. We failed to get into a barrack. There was a body of a man who had died recently in front of a barrack. We sat on this body. It was still warm and we got warmer. We sat on it until morning. We had thin robes on and we wrapped ourselves in blankets.

In the morning we saw that there were guards around the camp. There was nowhere to run. We didn't get any food. Hungry people picked potato peels, bones or whatever eatable they could find in garbage bins. We didn't get any food for a week. People were starving to death. We still had some bread left. It helped us to survive. It got dry. We dipped it in snow and put it into the mouth.

A week passed. There was a railroad spur near the camp. A train with freight railcars arrived at this spur and we were ordered to get on these platforms over the sides. They didn't open the doors and if somebody was too weak to get over the sides they shot them. We were staying close to the senior man of our barrack. There were warders standing by the sides of the railcars. They beat people with sticks to compact them in carriages. There were 120-130 people in each railcar. There wasn't even space for a match. We were given a piece of bread and sausage to go.

Buchenwald

Our trip to Buchenwald 10 lasted eight days and for these eight days we didn't get any food. At times, when there were people on the roads that our train passed they saw who was on the train and threw bread to us. Whoever caught a piece tried to bite on it before the others took it away. We put the dead in a corner and when the train stopped at stations the guards took the deceased to another carriage. There were approximately 20-25 survivors in our carriage when the train arrived at Buchenwald.

When we arrived our guards were so exhausted that they didn't even hurry us. The Buchenwald camp was on a hill and we dragged ourselves up the hill. I remember that my cousin Mendel found a piece of dry bread on the way to the camp. When we came to the bathroom he dipped it in hot water and put it in his mouth. We were given new clothing in the bathroom. We didn't have any

lice, although we hadn't washed ourselves for a week.

Then we went to a barrack. We didn't get any dinner. They brought junk coffee in a big wooden barrel with no sugar. We were hungry and drank this coffee to fill up our stomachs. Before going to sleep we received tin badges with numbers on them. We were told that we were to come to the canteen with these badges to get one meal per day. We slept on plank beds with nothing, not even straw, on them.

When the lights were turned off we could hear some inmates crying: the stronger ones were taking away badges from the weaker ones to get two meals instead of one. The three of us took turns to sleep to watch our badges.

We were lucky again. It's good luck that always matters. Since we were short we were taken to a barrack for young people. There were two barracks for children over five years of age and teenagers. There were two old men, about 70 years of age, watching them. Nobody tried to get our badges or hurt us otherwise in this barrack.

We didn't go to work. We stayed on our plank beds and went to eat at the canteen once a day. Our meal consisted of a bowl of thin soup and a slice of bread. We had to eat our bread at once or hide it well, because there were hungry inmates waiting in the yard to snatch out this bread and eat it.

The American front was approaching. Every day English bombers bombed German barracks at the bottom of a hill in the woods. They didn't drop bombs on our barracks, but we left our barracks and stayed outside during air raids. In case a bomb hit a barrack there was no chance to escape while in the open space we had a hope to survive.

Every day German wardens ordered a group of stronger inmates with rubber hose sticks to encircle two barracks and chase their inmates outside the gate on top of the hill. They didn't let them back. This was scaring since those people were left without even their miserable bowl of soup or slice of bread per day and had nothing ahead of them, but to die of hunger or bombs.

Then the day of 11th April 1945 came. On this day a group with rubber sticks encircled our barrack and began to chase us to the gate. We couldn't go back to the barrack in fear of rubber sticks, but we didn't want to go forward knowing that we would not be allowed to come back. A German officer sitting by the gate was watching the scene. We sat nearby hoping that they wouldn't dare to beat us in his proximity. Then an air raid began. They closed the gate and we returned to our barrack.

At night we heard shooting and explosions. The front was very near. In the morning there was silence in the camp. We ran out of the barrack: there was not a single German or guards on the towers. We climbed onto the roof of the barrack to look what was happening around. We saw American tanks near Buchenwald. Someone found gauntlets and cutting pliers with insulation on handles to cut the powered wire fence. We ran out of the camp in the direction of the tanks.

The Americans came to the camp. At this time the German commandment of concentration camps in Weimar was dictating an order on the phone to encircle the camp, shoot all prisoners and retreat. An American officer picked the receiver, laughed and repeated this order in English. One of the prisoners said it in Yiddish. Our luck was with us again this time.

Liberation

It didn't occur to our liberators that they shouldn't give starved people a lot of food to eat at once. They cooked big bowls of delicious stewed meat and hungry people pounced on this food. Many of them died. It was too much for them to handle. We survived though.

Then the Americans began to make lists asking where we came from and where we wanted to live. We said we were Czech citizens [Czechoslovak] since we were born during the Czech rule and we believed Hungarians were occupants and Czechia [Czechoslovakia] was occupied illegally. The officer making the list offered younger men to go to America. He said that we would get a profession and a job and if we wanted we could go to the US army.

A guy from our barrack who came from the Subcarpathia village of Gorinchovo [612 km from Kiev, 100 km from Uzhhorod] told me that he didn't want to return home to live in poverty. He decided to go to America and I decided to join him. Uncle Moishe wanted to return home. He thought that the whole family had perished and that he would have the land that had belonged to Grandfather Itzyk in his possession. He convinced my cousin Mendel to go with him.

We stayed in the camp several days. Moishe went to town picking things in ruined houses. He had a big suitcase and a backpack full of stuff. I found this conduct stupid and thought it was his greediness that made him do it.

Then a truck arrived to take people to Prague. When we were saying our farewells I had tears in my eyes. I felt afraid of parting with Moishe and Mendel and I got into the truck with them. Of course, I regretted my uncertainty at that moment many times later, but what can one do. We do not always make the right decisions…

We, 25 guys from Subcarpathia, were taken to a military hotel in Prague. A Czech captain took us to a room where we received new clothes and shoes. We could have free meals, go by tram and visit museums, but they were not sending us home. Sometime later we asked the captain when we were supposed to go home. He said that the Czech authorities couldn't send us to Subcarpathia since it belonged to the USSR. [Editor's note: The Soviet Union annexed Subcarpathia in 1945.]

We were offered to stay in Czechoslovakia since we were Czech citizens. We insisted that we wanted home and he said that he could only transfer us to the Soviet commander's office. We agreed and he took us to a frontier town. I don't remember its name.

There were many people in the yard of this office: girls, women, men. There were soldiers with shepherd dogs patrolling the yard. Women were crying, soldiers were cursing, yelling at people. The captain left us with the commandant's assistant and went away. Soldiers took away our belongings and ordered us to go peel potatoes in the kitchen.

We began to ask questions and the soldier explained that they were gathering people to put them on a train to Russia and then to a camp. And after three years of work in a camp they would know, he said, in what way we got to Germany.

Everything went dark before our eyes: from one camp to another! We began to think what to do. We were accommodated in a room on the second floor. We tied together ropes and belts, whatever we could get, climbed down onto the street and ran after our captain. We caught up with him

begging him to take us back. He returned to the commandant office with us. He told them it was a mistake and that we were Czech citizens [Czechoslovak] and that he had to take us back with him. They let us go, but we still wanted to get home.

The captain took us to the railway station and told us to stay away from Russian soldiers since there would be nobody to help us there. We got on the roof of a train heading to Budapest. At each stop soldiers inspected the train robbing its passengers: they took away their luggage and money.

There was an agency for those who returned from concentration camps in Budapest. They gave us some money and food. They also made lists of people to go to Israel, but we again decided it was best to go home. Of course, we were acting in haste, but we actually didn't give it a thought about what was waiting for us at home in Subcarpathia. We were feeling homesick and couldn't wait to see our dear home place. Hoping for the best is so common among young people.

Well, for whatever reason we were on the way home. We travelled by train for the most part of our trip. In Budapest we were given some food to go. We covered most of the route from the Hungarian border on foot. Every now and then local villagers gave us a ride in their horse-drawn wagons. They told us that some Jews had returned home from concentration camps.

After the War

There was nobody, but Father at home. I thought he had perished in the camp, but it turned out that the Germans didn't burn Monovice before leaving and Russian troops liberated the camp where my father was. He returned home in March 1945.

There were six survivors in our family: the three of us, my father, my mother's sister Rivka, who returned home shortly afterward, and my sister Ghitlia. Rivka was in Buchenwald and was liberated by the Americans. Ghitlia was in a labor camp in Auschwitz that was liberated by the Russians. She was taken to a Soviet camp for displaced individuals in Sverdlovsk region and stayed there a little over a year. She returned home in early 1947.

The rest of the family perished. There were no survivors among the ten brothers and sisters of my father. Only I and my sister of the seven children in our family survived. My paternal grandmother Etia perished in a concentration camp in Kosice. My father's sisters also perished there. Only my aunt Rivka of my mother's family survived.

Our house had been destroyed and robbed. Local residents robbed Jewish houses using them as a source of construction materials. We didn't have a place to live. My father died a week after he was liberated. It happened in January 1946. We buried him near Grandfather Itzhak's grave in the Jewish cemetery near Korolevo. It was a Jewish funeral.

There was one synagogue operating in Korolevo. Another synagogue was closed. Soviet authorities destroyed everything related to religion 11. They didn't need religion. They destroyed Jewish, Muslim and Christian temples and executed clergymen.

Aunt Rivka's husband returned to Korolevo. He was in a labor camp and then he was captured by Soviet troops. He was kept in a camp for prisoners-of-war and was released in 1946. Rivka's husband was a tailor and an expert in making garments from white wool that Hutsul people [local mountaineers] wear. He opened a shop in his home. Girls and women came to work and brought

their food with them. Rivka cooked for them. They worked and often stayed overnight in their home when there was much work to do.

When Ghitlia returned she also worked there and Moishe worked there as well. Then my sister met a Jewish man from Svaliava [635 km from Kiev, 55 km from Uzhgorod]. His last name was Mechlovich. He was a butcher and later became a cattle and meat supplier. He earned well, but he worked a lot and stayed away from home a lot. They got married. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah.

My sister went to live with her husband in Svaliava. They kept sheep, chickens and geese. My sister was a housewife after she got married. In 1949 their son Yuri was born. His Jewish name was Usher after my father. In 1953 their daughter Helena was born. Her Jewish name was Hendl after my mother. They were religious and observed Jewish rules.

After returning home I continued to observe Jewish traditions. On Saturday I went to the synagogue to pray. Rivka and her husband invited me to all Jewish holidays and I visited them on Friday evening to celebrate Sabbath.

There was a small synagogue in Korolevo and when Jews began to return from concentration camps there was not enough space for all of us. They came with their chairs and sat in the yard of the synagogue. The rabbi kept the door open so that those sitting in the yard could hear the service. The Soviet power closed this synagogue in 1956.

I lived alone after my sister got married. We all became Soviet citizens. In 1946 I went to a driving school in Khust to become a driver. I lived in Korolevo and walked 8 kilometers to Khust every day, round trip. In May 1947 I finished my studies. However, I didn't receive my driver's license at once. I had to wait until I had my practical training, but there was nowhere to get it, since there were too few cars after the war.

In October 1947 I was recruited to mandatory service in the Soviet army. We, recruits, were sent to Moscow. There were prisoners-of-war restoring the ruined city. They worked under the command of Soviet officers. In 1947 the prisoners were released and were replaced with recruits. I was enlisted in a construction battalion. Our construction battalion constructed airports in Monino, Domodedovo [outskirts of Moscow]. Those construction battalions required people with construction training: bricklayers, carpenters and painters.

I still wanted to become a driver to receive my license. There were a few old cars in this construction battalion. I decided to go work as a loader to be close to vehicles. I was hoping that with some luck they would allow me to drive a vehicle. It didn't happen.

I was often transferred from one construction battalion to another. Finally, I got into a construction unit involved in the construction of a dacha 12 for Stalin in Novyy Afon [today Georgia]. There is a big monastery on a hill, buried in gardens. It wasn't ruined at that time or later. The dacha was built right by the monastery. Later we were sent to unload the trains delivering construction materials to the construction site.

In some respect our living conditions in the army were better than in the concentration camp, but in others they were worse. We received 60 grams of black underbaked bread that stuck to your fingers and two lumps of sugar. We had porridge with no butter for breakfast, thin soup for lunch

and tea and bread in the evening. We worked hard and didn't get enough food. Some soldiers received food parcels from home, but there was nobody to send me any.

As for personal hygiene, the situation was worse than in a concentration camp. We very rarely received underwear or bed sheets to change. In the morning and in the evening we could wash ourselves with cold tap water. We were taken to the bathroom once in ten or more days. Many had lice.

I didn't face any anti-Semitism in the army. There was something else. We, who came from Western Ukraine, were called 'benderovtsi' and 'fascists.' Stepan Bandera 13 and fascists were fighting against the Soviet power. It didn't matter to them that I was a Jew. What mattered was that I came from Western Ukraine. [Editor's note: Subcarpathia was attached to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic after its annexation in 1945.] There was an openly hostile attitude toward us in the army. I got used to such forms of address as 'benderovets' and 'fascist' and I learned to keep my temper when hearing them.

In 1949 I was sent to serve in Gorkiy region, at Shakhunya railway station, some 700 kilometers from Moscow. This place was no good: swamps, woods, mosquitoes and midges. Or battalion constructed a narrow gauge railway. A group of soldiers did the construction and another group cut wood for ties. We lived in barracks and had to walk 5 kilometers every day to get to the job site. My commanders often picked on me for no reason whatsoever and sent me to do additional work for punishment.

Once during an interval all went to smoke and since I didn't smoke I went indoors to get warm. For this my commanding officer told me to wash the floors in the barracks. This injustice made me angry and I refused to follow the order. The commander of our battalion called me to his office. He asked me why I refused to follow the order. I described the situation to him and said that I would not follow unfair orders. He replied that when it comes to an order one must follow it at first and then make a complaint.

Then I couldn't contain myself any longer and said that I had been in a German concentration camp where the Germans killed their prisoners. They shot them, but they didn't taunt them like they did in the army. I thought that after this statement they would take me to prison and decided that it was going to be no worse in prison. However, the commander let me go. Shortly afterward the commander of our platoon was reduced in rank to private.

In 1950 an order for demobilization of recruits, born in the year 1926, was issued. In November 1950 I returned to Korolevo. I entered the driving school again and four months later I obtained a driver's license. I went to work as a driver at a timber facility rented by Moldavians. At that time there were not enough woodcutters in Subcarpathia and wood transportation was problematic. Therefore, local authorities used to lease wood sites for cutting and paid for work with wood rather than money.

I was rarely at home. My home was my timber transportation truck. I ate and slept in the cabin. When rental terms expired the Moldavians moved to Arkhangelsk in the north. I didn't go with them. Those drivers who stayed were employed by the Lvov Carpathian military regiment. A platoon was making wood stocks for military units. Soldiers cut wood and we, civilian drivers, were to transport it to the railway station where it was loaded onto carriages.

Later we were reassigned to KECh in Mukachevo. This was a utility service department. I worked there for a short time. There were old vehicles that often went out of order. There were no mechanics available. I had to fix my truck, but I didn't have any spare parts. I got tired of it and I quit. I returned to Korolevo and immediately got a job offer and went to work as a driver at the industrial enterprise. In 1958 they established vehicle yards and all drivers were transferred to work there. I worked at such a vehicle yard until I retired in 1986.

After I returned from the army I did my best to observe Jewish traditions. I had to go to work on Saturday, though, since it was a working day. However, I celebrated all Jewish holidays and never worked on them. I had to do some plotting to implement my plans. For example, on the eve of Pesach, Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur I removed some parts from the car and declared that something went wrong. A mechanic worked on it and I stayed at home on holidays. I always went to the synagogue on holidays.

When that Czech captain took us to the Russian zone I realized what the Soviet power was about. I saw soldiers making cigarettes with makhorka tobacco cursing heavily using the name of God and God's Mother. I saw people sent to Soviet camps for the only reason that they got into German concentration camps when the Soviet power couldn't protect them from the Germans.

These implications formed the basis for my attitude toward the Soviet power and it hasn't changed in the course of my life. I understood that I had to build up my patience and get adjusted to living in the Soviet Union: there was no other alternative for me, but I couldn't accept this regime.

When I was in the army they tried to force me to join the Komsomol 14, but I refused. They left me alone later. I never joined the Komsomol or Party. I worked as a driver earning my living and didn't care about what was happening in the USSR.

When Stalin died in 1953 people around were crying and lamenting questioning how they would go on living. I didn't care about Stalin's death. Frankly, I had a slight hope that when another individual came to power life would be easier, but then another came and then his replacement came to power and nothing changed.

I was skeptical about the speech of Khrushchev 15 at the 20th Congress 16 of the Party: if you are so smart, but you were beside Stalin and allowed him to do what he had done why would you condemn him after he died. They should have done it when he was alive.

Of course I couldn't remain indifferent when I heard about the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 17 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 18. I was indignant. But I understood that it was the policy of the USSR to suppress and keep people in fear.

I got married in 1954. My cousin Mendel Yanovich introduced me to my future wife. In 1947 he went to work in Donetsk region, in the town of Gorlovka [620 km from Kiev]. He met a Jewish family called Boldur: a mother and three daughters. Before the war they lived in Kharkov [430 km from Kiev], and then evacuated to Karaganda, Kazakhstan. After the war they moved to Gorlovka.

The father, Wolf Boldur, was deputy director of the railroad trust of restaurants of Donetsk region before the war. He went to the front at the beginning of the war and perished. The mother's name was Tatiana. Her Jewish name was Taiba. She was diner director in a mine in Gorlovka. Etia, the older daughter, was born in 1932, Raya, the middle one, was born in 1935, and Vera, whose Jewish

name was Dvoira, was born in 1938.

There were few Jewish families in Gorlovka and even fewer young girls. Mendel met Raya, the middle daughter. Her mother decided to help her future son-in-law. She helped him to resign from the mine and enter a driving school. Later she helped him to find a job. When they decided to get married Mendel moved the whole family to Khust. The mother became director of a diner and Raya became an accountant in this diner.

Mendel and Raya got married in Khust. They had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah. A rabbi from the synagogue in Khust conducted the ceremony. I met Vera and her family at Mendel's wedding. Vera was twelve years younger than I. She wasn't raised Jewish. She grew up in the Soviet Union and studied in a Soviet school. This is all there is to say about it. I liked her anyways and asked her mother's consent to our marriage. We got married shortly afterward.

I wanted to have a traditional wedding in Korolevo with a rabbi and a big party inviting all Jews in Korolevo to the wedding party. I had enough money to arrange it. There were few drivers and we earned well. But Vera's mother said that she or her relatives would not come to the wedding in Korolevo and that we were to have a wedding in Khust. Therefore, we didn't have a wedding party, but just a civil ceremony. Vera moved in with me.

Three months later we had a Jewish wedding in Korolevo. A rabbi from Svaliava conducted the ceremony. My sister invited him. There was plenty of food and we invited all Jews in Korolevo and our relatives.

After we got married Vera began to attend the synagogue in Korolevo on Saturday and Jewish holidays. She lit candles on Friday. We celebrated Jewish holidays at home. We followed the kashrut and we still have kosher utensils. We also kept special fancy crockery for Pesach in the attic. Jewish women taught Vera to cook Jewish food and make challot for Sabbath. Gradually my wife adopted the way of life I was used to.

In 1956 my wife and I moved to Khust. I worked at the industrial enterprise. We received a small house with a plot of land near it. There was one room, a kitchen and a verandah in the house. Later I made some improvements and built another room to the house. I planted fruit trees and vines near the house. Now these vines decorate the yard.

My wife and I went to the synagogue in Khust. It was the only synagogue operating in Khust and Subcarpathia that had not been closed or ruined. The Jews of Khust managed to protect it. The synagogue was near a shoe factory and authorities decided to give it into the ownership of the factory: they wanted to remove the fence around the synagogue and transform it into a club for the shoe factory.

However, Jewish women came at night to guard the synagogue. They were older women for the most part. They had hoes and axes with them and they stood up for it. The authorities didn't dare to fight with old women. If there had been men they would have imprisoned them and exiled them to Siberia. This miraculously defended synagogue operated through all years of the Soviet regime and it operates now as well.

Our first son Alexandr was born in 1958. His Jewish name is Usher after my father. Our second son Vladimir, born in 1962, has the Jewish name of Wolf after Vera's father. Both sons had their brit

milah. They studied at school and were Young Octobrists 19, pioneers 20 and Komsomol members as required in the Soviet times. However, I taught them everything Jewish boys should know. My sons knew Jewish history and traditions and knew their prayers.

They studied well at school. They helped their mother about the house and in the garden. After finishing an eight-year Ukrainian school in Korolevo, Alexandr entered a Forestry College in Khust. He finished it with a red diploma [awarded to students having only excellent grades] and worked as chief of industrial shops in Khust. My younger son Vladimir, after finishing the Electrotechnical College, worked as a repairman of household appliances.

They married Jewish girls and both sons had Jewish weddings with a chuppah. When in 1980 Alexandr's son David was born there was nobody who could perform the circumcision in Khust. My wife took my little grandson to Moscow where he had his brit milah. My younger son has two daughters: Olga, born in 1989, her Jewish name is Golda, and Helena, born in 1990, her Jewish name is Hendl after my mother.

My grandchildren know Jewish history, traditions and religion, everything a Jew should know. My older granddaughter Olga studies in a Jewish boarding school in Dnepropetrovsk. Of course, it's a pity that she doesn't live at home, but my granddaughter likes it there and I am happy for her.

When in the 1970s mass departures of Jews to Israel began I was eager to move there. Many of my relatives moved. My uncle Moishe, my father's younger brother, who was in a concentration camp with me, and his family moved to the USA. He lives in Brooklyn.

My mother's sister Rivka and her big family moved to the USA, too. They also live in Brooklyn. She has six daughters and two sons. She has about 70 grandchildren and great-grandchildren living there. Her daughters married religious Jews and had Jewish weddings and live according to Jewish rules.

My sister Ghitlia also moved abroad. Her husband died of a heart attack shortly before their departure. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Svaliava in accordance with all Jewish traditions and my sister, her son and daughter left for Israel. She lives in Rehovot. Her daughter got married in Israel and moved to the USA with her husband. Ghitlia's son and his family live in Israel.

Of course, I didn't want to stay here, but my wife and her family put an obstacle to our departure. They stated firmly that the USSR was their Motherland and that they didn't want to move. Of course, I tried to convince my wife, but we happened to have stayed here.

In the late 1980s my older son Alexandr and his family moved to Israel. They went to Rehovot where my sister lives. She welcomed my son and his family. They live in Rehovot. Alexandr's son David finished school and currently serves in the army. After demobilization he is planning to enter a university. My son works for a computer company. He is very happy with his job and life. I am very happy for them, but I didn't want to go with my son: it is too late to start a new life at this age. I wouldn't be able to find a job and I shall not be a burden or dependent.

When in the late 1980s perestroika 21 began I was skeptical about it like I would have been about any initiative of the Soviet power. Many promises – little doing. However, it turned out that I was wrong about it. There were notable changes. There came more freedom and people were not afraid of saying something wrong or in speaking to a wrong person. Persecutions of religious people

stopped and people could go to church and openly celebrate religious holidays. The Jewish life has revived.

The Iron Curtain 22 separating the USSR from the rest of the world was gone. People got an opportunity to travel abroad and invite their friends from abroad. I haven't traveled abroad, but my wife went to visit my sister when she fell ill and needed to be attended to. Vera returned with many impressions and acknowledged that she was wrong when she didn't want to move abroad, but our time was gone…

When Ukraine gained independence after the breakup of the USSR 23 in 1991, Jews got an opportunity to be Jews in the full meaning of this word. I think there is no state anti-Semitism at present or, at least, there is almost none. At least, I haven't heard of refusal in admission or employment because someone is a Jew.

There is Hesed 24 that provides big assistance to old people and single mothers. After Hesed opened in Subcarpathia in 1999 my son went to work there as curator of Khust district.

There are not many Jews left. Many emigrated to USA, Israel and Germany. Now there are mostly mixed families: Jewish men married to non-Jewish women and vice versa. Few people go to the synagogue now. There are not enough even for a minyan at times. People don't want to come to the synagogue, even though there are no bans. Young people don't need it, at least, the majority of young people. I go to the synagogue on Saturday and Jewish holidays and pray at home. I place tefillin on my hand and head like they taught me when I was a child and pray.

In the past it was forbidden to do any work on Saturday after the candles were lit. If somebody violated Saturday rules it was a disgrace, he felt ashamed of coming to the synagogue and look into other people's eyes. And now a man coming from the synagogue has a case in his hands and money in his pocket. He would pay his fee in a bus, go to the market or a store as if it should be this way.

They do not follow the rules as required. And it doesn't occur to people that they cannot be hurting God for too long, nobody thinks that two temples in Jerusalem were destroyed on the same day, 9th Av, in different years. Why did it happen - because they didn't follow the laws and now God will punish those who abandoned his faith and don't want to live like God tells us.

Glossary:

1 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)
Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the

region was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

2 Hasid

Follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

3 Orthodox communities

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869.They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,. In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

4 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.

5 German Invasion of Poland

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed

bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

6 Gulag

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

7 Forced labor [Labor/Working Battalion]

Under the 1939 II. Law 230, those deemed unfit for military service were required to complete "public interest work service". After the implementation of the second anti-Jewish Law within the military, the military arranged "special work battalions" for those Jews, who were not called up for armed service. With the entry into northern Transylvania (August 1940), those of Jewish origin who had begun, and were now finishing, their military service were directed to the work battalions. A decree in 1941 unified the arrangement, saying that the Jews were to fulfill military obligations in the support units of the National Guard. In the summer of 1942, thousands of Jews were recruited to labor battalions with the Hungarian troops going to the Soviet front. Some 50,000 in labor battalions went with the Second Hungarian Army to the Eastern Front - of these, only 6-7,000 returned.

8 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.

9 Gleiwitz III

A satellite labor camp in Auschwitz, set up alongside an industrial factory, Gleiwitzer Hütte, manufacturing weapons, munitions and railway wheels. The camp operated from July 1944 until January 1945; around 600 prisoners worked there.

10 Buchenwald

One of the largest concentration camps in Germany, located five miles north of the city of Weimar. It was founded on 16th July, 1937 and liberated on 11th April, 1945. During its existence 238,980 prisoners from 30 countries passed through Buchenwald. Of those, 43,045 were killed.

11 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.

12 Dacha

Country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

13 Bandera, Stepan (1919-1959)

Politician and ideologue of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, who fought for the Ukrainian cause against both Poland and the Soviet Union. He attained high positions in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN): he was chief of propaganda (1931) and, later, head of the national executive in Galicia (1933). He was hoping to establish an independent Ukrainian state with Nazi backing. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the OUN announced the establishment of an independent government of Ukraine in Lvov on 30th June 1941. About one week later the Germans disbanded this government and arrested the members. Bandera was taken to Sachsenhausen prison where he remained until the end of the war. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Munich in 1959.

14 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.

15 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

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

17 1956
It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

18 August 1968
On the night of 20th August 1968, the armies of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies (Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Bulgaria) crossed the borders of Czechoslovakia. The armed intervention was to stop the 'counter-revolutionary' process in the country. The invasion resulted in many casualties, in Prague alone they were estimated at more than 300 injured and around 20 deaths. With the occupation of Czechoslovakia ended the so-called Prague Spring - a time of democratic reforms, and the era of normalization began, another phase of the totalitarian regime, which lasted 21 years.

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

20 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.

21 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)
Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open

elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

22 Iron Curtain

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

23 Breakup of the USSR

Yeltsin in 1991 signed a deal with Russia's neighbors that formalized the breakup of the Soviet Union. The USSR was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

24 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.