

Raissa Makarevich

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Kiev

Ukraine

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Family Background

My name is Raissa Grigorievna Makarevich. That's my maiden name, I didn't change it after I got married. I was born on 12 February 1922 in Kiev.

My grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side died before I was born, so all I know about them is what my mother told me. My maternal grandfather's first name was Fivel, his last name was Golubchik. My maternal grandmother's name was Leya Golubchik. I don't know her maiden name. They lived in the town of Gornostaipol in Chernigov province. Later they moved to Kiev. I don't know exactly what my grandfather did for a living. Mamma said he owned a business, it may have been a small store. They were relatively well off. My mamma told me that my grandfather and grandmother were very religious. They attended their town's synagogue. Grandfather began each day with a prayer. He put on his tallit and tefillin. They celebrated all the religious holidays at home, and strictly observed kashrut. A Ukrainian woman, their neighbor, came to their place every Saturday to start the fire and help my grandmother around the house. On Saturdays Grandmother didn't do anything. Grandfather had been married before. Grandmother Leya was his second wife. He had one daughter, Lisa, from his first marriage. She was my mamma's older stepsister. Her last name was Gershman after she got married. She lived in Kiev. I called her aunt Leika. She died before the war. She left two daughters, Bella and Sarra. Bella was an English teacher, but she got sick after the evacuation and died in the mid-1950s. Sarra moved to the USA. She died there in 2001.

My mother had siblings: an older sister, Rysia, and a younger sister, Fruma. Mamma's older sister Rysia's married name was Shekhtman. She died before the revolution. I was born in 1922 and they gave me her name. Rysia Shekhtman had three children: a daughter, Ania, and twins, Boris and Naum. Ania got married. Her married name was Rappo. She finished high school in Kiev and worked as an economist. During the war she was evacuated and died around 1960 in Kiev. Boris finished military college before the war, was summoned to the front as a lieutenant, and perished in 1942. Naum finished his degree at an institute in Kiev before the war. After Ukraine's western territories were united with the rest of Ukraine, he was sent to work there. He disappeared before

the war. Mamma's younger sister Fruma was married but she didn't have any children. During a flu epidemic, Fruma got sick and died at the age of 32.

My mother, Dvoira Makarevich (née Golubchik), was born in Gornostaipol in 1894. Her family eventually moved to Kiev, but I don't know when or why they moved. In Kiev, Mamma finished high school. Later she became a seamstress - a prestigious profession for Jewish girls. She met my father in Kiev.

My father, Gersh Peisah-Aizekovich Makarevich, was born in Kiev in 1886. He became an orphan at the age of 12. I know nothing about his parents. I know he had a brother - Naum, who lived in Podol, Kiev, with his family. I don't remember Naum; he died at an early age. His son, Mikhail Makarevich (my cousin), perished during the war. He was part of the River Fleet and was involved in the evacuation of women and children. He perished during an air raid on the Dnieper. My father, being an orphan, became a butcher's apprentice and later started working at a butcher's shop. During the First World War, my father was a private in the tsarist army. He served for a period in Ussuriysk. He was photographed while there and sent the picture to my mother - they had met by then. He was wounded and sent to a hospital in Moscow. Mamma went to Moscow to take care of him. Given the period, this was a bold step as they weren't yet married. Once Father recovered he returned to Kiev and got a job with the same butcher. My father and mother got married soon after, in 1917.

They had a traditional Jewish marriage in a synagogue. They observed all the rituals, and there was chuppah. My father was a very religious man. My father and mother always went to the synagogue on Saturday. He always prayed - donning the tallit right up until the end of his life. He died in 1972. Mamma said his time serving in the tsarist army had been a trial for him, he hadn't wanted to join. But he didn't have parents, so he had nobody to stand up for him. And so he had no choice. After my parents got married, they rented an apartment in a three-story building on Bratskaya Street, in Podol. Their landlord was a Jew, his name was Lukashevich. There were fifteen apartments in the building and they were all leased. Our apartment was on the first floor.

My parents got married in 1917, and in 1919 they had their first daughter, my older sister Feiga. At home we called her Fenia. Fenia went to school and took music classes. (It was fashionable to give children music lessons.) After she finished school she worked as an accountant at the plant. Later, she married a Jew named Raikhstadt. Fenia was in evacuation during the war. After the war she continued to work at the plant. She died in Kiev in 1987. Her husband is alive, he is ninety years old. During the war he was at the front, got captured, and went through several concentration camps. He managed to hide the fact that he was Jewish and miraculously survived. He lives with his daughter and my cousin Lina.

In 1920 my older brother Naum was born. He was named after Daddy's brother Naum. Naum died as a baby. Mamma told me that, because it happened during the pogrom in Kiev, they couldn't bury the baby's body. People were afraid to leave their homes and there was nobody to bury the dead. Daddy hired a cab and took his dead son to the cemetery to bury him.

This period was terrible, when Jewish people were killed for no reason. Mamma told me that across the street from us, at Bratskaya 9, a rabbi and an Orthodox Christian priest lived in the same building. During the pogrom, the priest hid the rabbi's family and the families of all of the

neighboring Jews, including our family. Bandits did not dare to enter the priest's home. This priest was a very kind and honest man. In 1938, during the period of repression, both the rabbi and the priest were arrested. They disappeared without a trace - they were probably killed. I have dim memories of the rabbi and the priest, but I remember the rabbi's daughter, Donia, well. We used to play with her. I never saw her after the war. They say she perished at Babi Yar.

My younger sister Rosa was born in Kiev in 1925. During the war she was in evacuation with me. After the war she married Leonid Markman. My sister was always very sick and couldn't work. In the late 1970s she, her husband, and her son Vladimir moved to the USA. She lives there now, in Cleveland.

Growing Up

I'm the middle sister. I was born on 12 February 1922. Our family lived at Bratskaya Street 8. We had a two-room apartment and everything we needed. We had metal beds, but, then again, we also had a leather sofa, embroidered and starched little napkins, little china elephants on the shelf. These were the symbols of being well-to-do. Our kitchen was really big, but this may have just been my impression as a child. The girls lived in one room until our older sister got married, and the parents lived in another room. After Fenia got married, we moved into the room with our parents and the newlyweds got a room to themselves. The toilet and water were in the yard, but we were used to it. We had electricity.

In the early 1920s, during NEP [New Economic Policy], Daddy worked in a big butcher shop. We were living the good life then; my parents could afford to pay for a big apartment, we had good food and clothes. After NEP, my father worked in an ordinary, state-owned store and our life became more complicated. But still, we were an average family. We were not poor.

We lived in Podol, near the synagogue, and my parents went there every week. When Father couldn't go to the synagogue, he prayed at home. We celebrated Shabbat at home. Father had to go to work, as he worked in a state-owned store. But our mother didn't even light the primus [small kerosene stove] - she asked us to do it for her. I also went to our old neighbor, Tsylia, to light her primus on Saturdays. Because Mamma didn't touch money on Saturday, as it wasn't allowed, we bought everything we needed in advance. On Friday evenings Mamma used to light the candles and say a prayer.

We celebrated all the Jewish holidays at home. During Pesach, Father went to the synagogue and brought back a basket of matzah. We cleaned up the house and put our beautiful kosher dishes on the table. Mamma called them "Easter dishes." Father sat at the head of the table and guided the first seder. He said all the traditional prayers and words in Yiddish. All the traditional items were laid out on the table at Pesach: matzah, bitter greens, eggs, chicken. And Mamma cooked a lot of other delicious things. There was no bread in the house during Easter. For Purim, Mamma always baked hamantash, little triangular pies stuffed with poppy seeds. We had guests over to our house and they all drank wine and enjoyed themselves. At Hanukkah we children would always get money and gifts. But at that time we didn't understand the origin of these holidays. Our parents didn't tell us anything. During Yom Kippur Mother and Father kept the fast, but the children didn't. Children were not supposed to fast. At home our parents spoke Yiddish to each other, and Russian to us children.

When I was six years old I started attending Jewish school. I was small and they didn't want to admit me. But I was bored at home, I was a smart girl, and so Mamma convinced them to let me go to school. At the Jewish school we studied the same subjects as in Russian or Ukrainian schools. The only difference was that the language of instruction was Yiddish. But we didn't have any special subjects related to the history of the Jewish people, their culture, or their religion. I studied at this school for five years and then went to the Russian school. Our entire class moved to the Russian school because the Jewish one closed. This was around 1932. Goldhar, the director of the Jewish school, was arrested in the early 1930s. He was charged with having ties to Zionists. I don't know what happened to him, but I never saw him again.

When I got to the Russian school, I made quite a few Russian and Ukrainian friends. They treated us very well. All nationalities were equal back then. Podol, where we lived, was a historically Jewish neighborhood. Many Jewish families lived there. One of my classmates was Misha Reider, who became a musician and worked in the philharmonic. His brother, Abram Reider, became a military pilot and served in the army throughout the entire war. There were also our neighbors, the Olevskiy family, who all got a higher education and became candidates and doctors in the sciences. Basically what I'm saying is that, before the war, the Jews were treated the same as any other nationality. I didn't know the word "zhyd," I'd never heard it.

I liked my school. I liked math the most out of all my subjects. I was also part of the school's dancing and singing clubs. Soviet schools only observed Soviet holidays, and rejected all the others. So if I had missed school and stayed home to celebrate a Jewish holiday, I would have been punished as if I had just been skipping. But we did celebrate the Soviet holidays: the 1st of May, October Revolution Day. I remember our regional office sent a wagon to take all the residents to the festive parade in Kreschatik. After the parade, we had guests; Mamma laid the table and they all enjoyed themselves.

But it was not always like this. I remember well the Ukrainian famine of 1933. Father got horse sausage somewhere. He and Mamma didn't eat it, they left it for us, children. I remember the starving people. Once, I came down our building's stairs and saw a stranger. He was lying on the ground, his legs were swollen and huge as barrels, he was breathing hard and died soon after. Sometime later, a wagon covered with black cloth came to pick up the dead man. At school they gave us some food and bread in exchange for special coupons. Our situation at home was a little better than it was for other families – at least our father worked in a store. Mamma taught us to share bread and food with those who were suffering more than us. And at school we always shared our breakfast with other children.

At school, I was an Octobrist and a pioneer. I was proud to wear my red pioneer tie – I thought it was the most beautiful thing ever. My father, however religious he was, was understanding about our interest in all this stuff. He did not object to our becoming pioneers and, later, Komsomol members. We, in turn, respected his outlook and his faith. Our family was very close.

I finished seven classes at school. I went to work at the Kiev-Petrovka railroad station as an assistant accountant and then became a full accountant. While working there, I took night classes and finished secondary school. At the same time, I became a member of the Komsomol League and the Komsomol Bureau.

I had many friends and we celebrated holidays together. In 1940, at a New Year's celebration, I met my future husband. He came with his girlfriends, but he liked me very much. The following day he found out my address and came to our home. He started courting me and we got married on 5 March, by which time I had turned 18.

My husband's name was Sokolanskiy Semyon Phippovich. He was much older than me. He was born in 1908 in Kiev, but his family came from Litin, in the Vinnitsa region. I didn't know my husband's parents. But I did know his brothers, Victor and Yuriy. They both held high, official positions and were Party members. My husband had finished his service in the army and graduated from the Institute of Trade. He was the director of a store. We didn't have a big wedding. We just had a festive dinner. Although my parents insisted on a religious wedding, we didn't have any religious rituals. We didn't even want to hear about it, as I was a Komsomol member and my husband was a Party member. I moved to my husband's place. He had a big room in a communal flat in the center of town. Four families were living in this apartment. There was a big kitchen and each family had a coal stove. There was running water and a toilet.

At the beginning of 1941 our daughter Larissa was born. She died from diphtheria at the age of two years and ten months during the evacuation.

We knew about fascism and Hitler, but we all thought the disaster wouldn't touch us.

During the War

On 22 June 1941, as we were on the way to the beach, we heard that the war had begun. Molotov made an announcement at 12:00 over the radio. I had heard the sound of an air raid earlier, but I didn't know why. On that same day, my husband received his military call-up papers and left. I took my child and we went with him to the military office. I remember the crying women in the yard of the military office well. They were saying their farewells to their husbands, sons, and brothers. From there, I went to my parent's place in Podol. We stayed in Kiev for a while. But we didn't think of evacuation, even though many people were leaving.

My husband stayed in the area around Kiev for a while. Their military unit was between Nezhyn and Bakhmach. In August, he came to Kiev with his commanding officer, Colonel Vlasov. The Germans were near the town, they told us. Kiev was in a panic. People were stealing food from the stores and the markets were closed. People were saying there were German spies disguised in the town. Colonel Vlasov told me to evacuate immediately. He said that the army would leave Kiev soon.

We all left Kiev on the same truck on which my husband and colonel Vlasov had arrived: Larissa and I, my older sister Fenia, my younger sister Rosa, and my parents. We went to Bakhmach where my husband's military unit was, and later we all moved to Akhtyrka, in the Sumskaya region. My husband was with his military unit, and we rented an apartment. But we didn't stay there long. As the front moved closer to Kiev, the military command organized the evacuation of all military families. They sent us to some plant in Ulianovsk. We went there on a freight train. On the way, we stopped in Kharkov. There was a terrible raid going on there that killed tons of people.

It took us several weeks to get to Ulianovsk. When we arrived, we rented a room. I started work as an accountant at the plant, and my sister Rosa worked in a shop there. As a military wife, I received 400 grams of bread and 200 grams for my child. My parents got bread through ration

cards. As a military family we also received some wood. This was a great help as the winters were very cold.

I was a Komsomol member and we were all extremely patriotic. I went to the hospital to care for the severely wounded. In 1943 I became a member of the Communist Party.

My husband was part of the front-line forces. He was wounded in a battle around Rostov and sent to the hospital in Oufa. I needed a special permit to visit him, and I managed to get it because he was severely wounded. His leg was damaged and he became an invalid.

I returned to Ulianovsk and after some time my husband joined me there. He got a job with a local trade organization and our life got a little better. Later, I changed jobs and joined the State Trade Inspection. I was the Ulianovsk Region's State Trade Inspector for the Ministry of Trade of the USSR. I was responsible for inspecting public catering establishments, canteens, and stores. I received more food through ration cards as my provisions now came under category A, a category reserved for managerial staff. We received meat and oil. In general, we managed all right.

I remember one store inspection that happened before the holidays. Remizov, Head of the Department for the Struggle Against Theft of Socialist Property, accompanied me during this inspection. We entered a store and he told the shop assistants, "Put your bags on the counter and stay where you are." This was to prevent them from hiding food in their bags. The store was found to have an excess of egg powder [at that time, people were given egg powder instead of meat]. The director of this store, Valia, was a widow. Her husband had perished on the front. She had two small children. She got so scared that we would find out about the excess, which would mean court and then prison for her. Remizov trusted me completely and never double-checked my findings. So I issued a deed of inspection indicating that everything was all right and entered the figures that should have been there. I was risking my own neck, but I felt sorry for Valia. That evening, Valia found me and came to our home. She brought a package of cookies, cried, and thanked me for saving her from jail. I didn't take the cookies, of course, and I sent her home. I always tried to help people if I could, because this was a terrible time.

I felt awfully sorry for children. They never got enough food and they were always sick. My daughter Larissa died in Ulianovsk in 1944. She had diphtheria. My mother was in hospital with her, as I couldn't leave my job. The doctors couldn't help Larissa – they didn't have the necessary medication. My husband was on a business trip in Ulan-Ude. By the time he returned, Larissa had died. We mourned our daughter deeply. Only work could distract us a little. At the end of 1944, my daughter Nelia was born.

After the War

The entire family of my mother's relative, Goldenberg, perished at Babi Yar. They had missed their window to evacuate. Boris Shehtman, my cousin, perished on the front. My husband's sister, Maria Sokolianskaya, perished in the Northern Caucasus. She was a nurse in the kindergarten and they evacuated with the children to the Northern Caucasus. They were captured by the Germans there, and Maria was shot because she was a Jew. David Raikhstadt, my sister Fenia's husband, went through several concentration camps. He managed to conceal the fact that he was a Jew. In one of the camps, somebody reported that he was a Jew. When he was called up for a medical

examination, his Russian went in his stead. He rescued him.

In 1945 we returned to Kiev. My husband, Nelia, my sister, her child, and I traveled by train. My parents arrived in Kiev later. Our apartment on Chkalov Street had been occupied, and we were not allowed to move in. We lived for some time with our neighbor Musia on Chkalov Street. She was Russian and had stayed in occupied Kiev. Her husband became a traitor and was executed when our forces returned. We only lived there a few days. My husband thought that a longer stay might spoil our reputation, as both of us were Party members.

My husband received a small room in Podol as a war invalid. It was a small room with a little kitchen, a stove, and a sink. That was all there was but we were happy to have anything, however small. We were happy to be back in our dear city.

Kiev was destroyed, Kreschatik was in ruins.

I remember going to watch the execution of the fascists. They were hanged in the square in front of the Conservatory. These were the Germans that had tortured people during the occupation. The whole town came to watch the execution, there were thousands of people.

I needed to find a job after the war. But after the war the general attitude towards Jews was totally different. It was next to impossible for a Jew to find a job. When my sister's husband returned, he asked his acquaintance from the Town Party Committee to help me find a job. His answer was "We already have one Rabinovich in commerce." He was talking about Rabinovich, the director of Podolskiy's department store. I couldn't find a job for a long time, all because I was a Jew. Finally, and with much difficulty, they helped me get a job as an accountant in a shop. There were many such small shops and they were the only places that would hire Jews. But you still needed connections to get this sort of job. I worked there until 1956, and then I went to work for the Kiev Artists' Community, where I worked until retirement.

My husband didn't have any problems finding a job. During the war he managed to change his official nationality. He became a Ukrainian when they were reissuing his papers after he was wounded. He came to Ulianovsk as a Ukrainian. So my husband didn't have any problems with employment. He found a job as a director of a store.

In 1947 our second daughter, Svetlana, was born. Although we had a family and two daughters my husband and I didn't get along. In the early 1950s he went to Kemerovo on a business trip and never returned. After that, he was seldom interested in our life, never helped, and rang only on holidays. We got divorced years later. I worked hard for the rest of my life to raise my daughters and provide them with a good education. My ex-husband saw his daughters rarely, and only if it was on his way to the Crimea or the Caucasus. He died a long time ago, in 1978. We didn't even know where the funeral was.

I've been proposed to several times over the years, but I was always afraid of giving my children a stepfather that treated them badly. So I didn't remarry.

My girls Nelia and Sveta finished school. They did very well. This was during the eruption of anti-Semitism. Nelia and Sveta chose to be officially recognized as Ukrainian rather than Jewish. By having Ukrainian written on their passports they were able to enter educational institutes. Their

friends were mainly Russian and Ukrainian.

At home we didn't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate any Jewish holidays. I was a Party member and I was afraid.

My parents moved into our old apartment in Podol when they returned home from evacuation. After the war, my father worked in a store for a while. Then he retired. My mother didn't work. My father died in 1972 and my mother died in 1977. My parents continued to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate all the holidays. They regularly went to the synagogue in Podol. All our relatives got together at their place during Pesach. My children and I also went. I believe my girls identified as Jews, even though they were officially listed as Ukrainian. They always asked my father about Jewish holidays, traditions, and the history of our people.

Nelia finished her degree at the Institute of Trade and Economy. She worked in commerce for several years. Now she is retired. Her husband is Ukrainian, but he treats Jews with respect. My grandson, Yura, Nelia's son, works at a car company. They lead a moderate life. They have enough to survive.

Sveta also married a Ukrainian. She got her degree from the same institute as Nelia. Sveta has two children, Vita and Andrei. Vita graduated from the same institute and she's doing well. Andrei, my dearest grandson, died recently. He had diabetes. He started to lose his sight. Then he developed severe kidney problems. Andrei died in November 2001. In 11 days he would have been twenty eight years old. When Andrei got really sick, Sveta asked me to help them move to America and join them there. It was difficult for her to leave with a sick child. Sveta thought he could be saved in America. Andrei kept saying "Granny, you are my only hope." They left in 1993. I never wanted to leave, but I kept thinking about it. And then it was too late. Andrei died.

My older sister Fenia died in 1987 in Kiev, and my younger sister Rosa lives in Cleveland, USA. I visited her in 1990.

Strange as it may seem, I identify as Jewish more than I did when I was young. I feel drawn to Jewish history and to my ancestors. I read Jewish newspapers and watch the Jewish program "Yahad" on TV. But I don't know whether God exists, at least in this world. It seems to me that if he did exist he wouldn't have allowed the extermination of over six million Jews during the war, and he wouldn't have allowed my grandson to die. But maybe I am just not a believer.

After perestroika, many religious and Jewish communities popped up all over Ukraine. But I cannot trust the sincerity of those who were communists yesterday and today are holding candles in the Orthodox churches or putting on a kippah. However, I do try to celebrate Jewish holidays. I buy matzah at Pesach and observe the fast at Yom Kippur. I do what I couldn't do during the Soviet years.

I'm glad that we got the opportunity to go back to our Jewish roots, to our history. I am so happy that you've come to hear about my family, just one story from the history of the Jewish people. Thank you.