

Chaya Sakhartova

Chaya Girshevna Sakhartova looks younger than her age [82](#). Her speech is very literary and her excellent education shows immediately. She laughs a lot and her voice is youthful. Chaya Girshevna is very hospitable and a wonderful cook. Her neighbors, relatives and friends visit her often. She likes reading very much and her sofa is covered with books, mostly modern literature. She lives alone in a very cozy one-room apartment. There are a lot of pictures in the room, mainly of her son and his family. Chaya Girshevna is a very good-natured person and it is easy and pleasant to talk to her.

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My family background

I was born in the town of Roslavl in Smolensk region in 1921. My maternal grandmother's name was Basya Yankelevna Lebyan, she was born in 1867. My grandmother lived in Sukhinichi; it's a small town not far from Roslavl [town in Kaluga region, 105 km south-west of Kaluga, population about 20.000]. A lot of Jews lived in our town and there was quite a Jewish community there [it was not a shtetl, or a town with a big Jewish community that played a prominent role in the life of the city: the population was multinational]. My grandparents lived very poorly there, that was the reason for their moving to Roslavl. Unfortunately I can't remember any more details about this town. They had a knitting shop there, they knitted stockings. Later they moved from Sukhinichi to Roslavl. Grandmother was very business-like. She set up a business there.

My maternal grandfather's name was Simon Leibovich Lebyan. He was born in 1862 somewhere in Smolensk region. Grandfather sewed hats, he was a hatter. He was a very nice person and was completely under the thumb of my grandmother, who was very strict and serious. But at the same time Grandfather satisfied many of our whims. I remember the following incident: when the little son of my mother's sister fell sick – he died later, unfortunately – we, the elder children, were sent to stay with our grandparents for some time. Our family – my parents, siblings and I – lived separately from our grandparents at that time. I should mention that my grandparents observed the kashrut. However, I suddenly craved for some sausage. I was about eight and I was very stubborn. I yelled until Grandfather went to buy sausage for me. But since it wasn't kosher, he had to chop the sausage with an axe in the corridor and feed us there, in order not to spoil the dishes,

since everything was kept kosher.

My grandmother observed traditions, but in a rather limited way. On Pesach she changed dishes from the common to Pesach ones and Grandfather tinned the samovar, so that everything would be like new for Pesach. To tin means to clean, polish the dishes. They were not Orthodox Jews. They dressed like petty bourgeois, as did everyone else in town. However, they attended the synagogue and I visited them there. Before his death, my grandfather became a very pious man, began to attend the synagogue regularly and read religious books, though in Russian translation. Unfortunately, neither my grandfather, nor my grandmother knew Yiddish and spoke Russian at home all the time.

They lived rather poorly: Grandfather earned little money, he even worked as a carter for some time, and Grandmother had to bake pies and sell them at the market-place. They rented a room in a wooden one-storey house from a Russian family. There was certainly no water supply system, no heating or electricity there. They had to go to the water-pump at the end of the road. They had a Russian stove [1](#) in their room with a stove-bench. They also had a small vegetable garden, where they grew vegetables; and a small husbandry, hens and a cow that Grandfather milked. No one helped them; that's why they worked hard. Their children were busy with their own households and lived separately. My grandparents had very good neighbors and were not interested in politics. They had no other relatives except for us, their children and grandchildren in Roslavl. We had the kindest and closest relations with them.

My grandparents had four children: my mother Libe and her younger sisters Alexandra, Dunya and Anna. I don't know when they were born. Dunya died of galloping consumption at a young age. Alexandra got married and left for Donbass [Donetsk, coal-mining region in Ukraine] and Anna lived and studied in Moscow.

My mother, Libe Simonovna Farbirovich [nee Lebyan], was the eldest child in her family. She was born in 1897 in Sukhinichi. She must have had some education, because she could read and write in Russian, it was her mother tongue; though she didn't have any special education. Maybe she studied at home, with a private tutor. Mother was a very beautiful woman with wonderful long hair. She wasn't religious at all; she didn't attend the synagogue and didn't teach us to do so.

I don't know anything about my father's parents; I only know that Grandfather Faivel Farbirovich, my father's father, was a soldier in Nikolai's army [2](#). Because of that he was allowed to settle in a Russian town [3](#).

My father, Girsha Faivelovich Farbirovich, was born in 1885 in Roslavl. His mother-tongue was Russian. He went to cheder for six years. And right after that he started to work. He worked as a butcher. Actually all Farbirovich brothers were butchers, they had a stall where they chopped meat and sold it. Unfortunately I don't have any other information about them. Father praised the Soviet power in every way possible, since all his children were able to get university education. Though, in general, my parents were not interested in politics. Father was a soldier in the Tsarist Army [1914-1918]. At first he served at the frontier post in Eastern Siberia and later participated in World War I. He was taken prisoner-of-war by the Germans during World War I. He was very satisfied with the way they treated them. He was in prison for a long time and worked for the Germans during that period.

The town of Roslavl, where our family lived, is a big ancient Russian town founded in the times of the Rurik dynasty [the most ancient regents of Russia], famous for its artificial mounds. The town is very beautiful, green and hilly. At the time mostly merchants lived there. There were a lot of Russian Orthodox churches. Thus it was a native Russian Orthodox town. When we visited it for the last time – about ten years ago, in the 1990s – we went into a Russian Orthodox parish, where the municipal administration arranged an exhibition on the history of Roslavl. What was most interesting, those merchants, who had been deported from the town years ago [after the Russian Revolution], left their property to the town, a lot of china and crystal objects. We thought it unbelievable. We couldn't understand how people, so much wronged by the Soviet power, could behave like that.

The roads in Roslavl were paved with the most common stone, there were also old stairs, used for climbing up the mountains, for example, the Butzev Mountain; the stairs were very old and dangerous, they broke when people stepped on them. But we were children and of course we went there, as any kid would have done. I remember we had a movie-theater in town, it was called Milana. It had a very interesting location: to get here you had to descend the Butzev Mountain and the movie-theater was at the foot of it. But we needed money to go to the movies; we had to ask Mother for permission and Father for money. The drama group came to our town very rarely. Father liked theater very much and as soon as a show came to town, he immediately went there and took us with him. There was no permanent theater in town.

There was a very good synagogue in Roslavl, a big and beautiful one. It was destroyed by the Germans later. The community wasn't big: there weren't many Jews, approximately seven percent of the total population. There was also a cheder in town. Though the attitude to the Jews was good and there was no anti-Semitism, still it wasn't easy to live there. Almost no one had their own place: everybody had to rent apartments, as there were almost no native Jews in Roslavl, only those who came from neighboring villages. It was very expensive to buy a house, that is why everybody rented apartments. The money was mainly earned through carters' trade and agriculture. We had a very good market-place, because neighboring peasants were mostly engaged in agriculture and took all their goods to the market-place. The market place was working permanently and everything was very cheap.

In 1912 my father married my mother. He returned from the army and their mutual friends introduced him to her. They had their wedding at the synagogue. Father wasn't very religious, though he prayed sometimes and attended the synagogue. I even keep his prayer book. Father was a very kind and quiet man.

Growing up

My parents had three children of their own: Divora [1913-1984], Milya [1930-1989] and Chaya, that is me, born in 1921. Mother had two adopted children as well. One of her sisters died of galloping consumption and her daughter Sonya, who was several months old at the time, was left alone. And my mother's other sister simply gave my mother her son, Vladimir, to bring up. I can't remember why it happened. Thus my parents had five children.

At first we didn't live well financially. We rented an apartment from a priest's family. Though he had passed away by then, his wife lived there with their three daughters. They lived very poorly. At first they occupied the whole house and our family rented an outhouse in the yard. I remember

very well both the house and the sour cherry tree, under which later I sat and prepared for my entrance exams for university. Later, in 1929, the state moved us to a big house at a different address, where we occupied a large three-room apartment. After that, I cannot tell which year it was, some army officers were sent to live there with their families. The Sychyov family was the first one to live with us; the head of the family was of some low rank, maybe a lieutenant. He arrived with his wife and child, so we had to squeeze together and give them one room [4](#). This military man tried to educate me. For example, when I read a book called 'The Honeymoon,' he came up to me, took the book and told me that it was too early for me to read such things. I was about ten. The funniest thing is that I can't even vaguely remember the plot of the book; I think it was some romantic novel.

Later that military unit was moved to a different location, and a family of a military man of a higher rank, Major Dyukov, came to our place. They were very nice people. His wife embroidered on a sewing machine and taught my mother to do it. We were very good friends with them until we bought a house there, in Roslavl, but in a different part of the town. Our new house was very beautiful, a wooden one, of course, one-storey, but with a mezzanine, some kind of an extension. We all moved to that house and lived there until the war started in 1941 [5](#). When we bought the house, our parents couldn't register it in their name for some reason [6](#), it was considered a 'criminal' thing to do; such was the situation at that time. I can't remember why. They bought the house on behalf of our grandmother. The house was big, with three rooms, a kitchen, a pantry and a big terrace. However, there was no bathroom, and, as a matter of fact, no water supply system.

We brought water from the well that was located at the foot of the mountain. You had to go down that slippery mountain, pour some water in the bucket and walk back home. The water-pumps in the streets appeared much later. That is why it was necessary to run to the well all the time. Later, when we began to live better, we hired a woman who carried the water and did the washing. It was a Russian woman of middle age, her name was Frouza. She helped Mother, who worked very hard. We even had to hire a nanny for Milya, my youngest sister. She was an illiterate peasant woman from a village, who simply took care of the child.

We always had wonderful neighbors. Our parents were friends with the priest's wife. Mother loved her very much. The girls, the priest's daughters, taught us a lot. They arranged some chairs, sat us on the chairs and acted as teachers. The priest's widow and her daughters had a very good attitude towards us. The children, that is, us, were raised at home, though there was a kindergarten in town already. Mainly we were taught by the priest's daughters. When I went to school, I could already read and write and I am very grateful to them for that. We lived in the outhouse of their house at that time. However, I've lost contact with them by now, but at that time we were very good friends. Later, in the 1930s, when the Soviet power came into force, they were driven out of the big house and placed in one room [7](#). One of the girls, Lyudmila, committed suicide, because they were tortured in every way possible [8](#).

My parents had very good relations with their relatives. I remember Aunt Dora and Uncle Matvey Gendlin, my mother's relatives, and Father's sister, Aunt Riva, whom we often visited.

There were 'punys' in our yard, cow-pens. I remember that when I said this word at university, I was laughed at. Above those 'punys' was a hay-loft. It was badly put together and the boards broke all the time. We were not allowed to go inside it, though we did. Divora, my elder sister, even fell

through once in that shed. She had to repeat the year at school and she was terribly scared that she would be scolded, so she got into that hay-loft. She lay there and cried. At that moment the boards fell apart and she fell through, but she didn't hurt herself seriously. After that no one went inside the shed.

I also remember the following incident. There was another yard behind our yard, which was called the 'black yard.' There was a dump pit in that yard. We were not allowed there, but of course we went there anyway. Once, a hornless cow managed to throw me onto her back. It happened in that yard. Thank God, I wasn't injured, but I never went there anymore.

When time came for me to go to school, I was tested on my knowledge of Yiddish and other languages, but I knew nothing except for Russian and that is why I wasn't accepted in cheder. I studied at a common Russian high school. In my opinion the school was very good, we had wonderful teachers. Our teacher of mathematics, Aron Grigoryevich Karchmar, was a very good teacher. When I was finishing school, he told me that I would never pass the math exam, but I got an excellent mark. We also studied German, it was taught by an old woman. She was a bad teacher: she knew German poorly and she couldn't establish discipline in the classroom, all pupils always yelled in her lessons. I remember her nickname – 'Bobka.' When I finished school I didn't know the German language, so at university I began to learn English, which I don't know now either. We had a very good teacher of Russian, Markelova, who taught us as follows: she liked to read and she read a lot to us during lessons. Later, when we were in the eighth grade, her husband had to continue our education. And we turned out to be completely illiterate, because Markelova hadn't taught us how to spell the words. But we adored her! And from the eighth grade up until our graduation he tried very hard to make us literate [there were nine-year schools in the USSR at that time]. I loved reading most of all. Then we had this teacher, who I was really in love with, and because of whom I chose to study at the Faculty of Biology and Soils – Maria Grigoryevna Shtyrkina, an old and very intellectual Russian woman. She taught us biology. We all loved her very much, I did in particular. When I was later advised to enter the Faculty of Biology and Soils, I did so without any hesitation. After school almost all the kids from our grade entered some sort of university.

One third of my classmates were Jews. We had a very united class: after World War II my classmate, Yakov Rubin, got everybody, who had survived, together and every five years we met in Roslavl. People came not only from the Soviet Union, but also from abroad, as many were assigned to military service, for instance, in Hungary, but they all came. There were many of us and we always had fun. It was all very nice because one of our classmates was the manager of a boarding school in Roslavl and he arranged the reception. We were very comfortable and had a good time there.

There was no anti-Semitism at all, either at school or in Roslavl in general. I had no friends outside of school; my best friends were Raya Shirman and Raya Ioffe. I had both Jews and Russians as friends; their nationality never mattered to me.

By the time I grew up, the Pioneer [9](#) House was organized in our town. We staged plays and performances in that Pioneer House, it was all very interesting. We became even closer friends there. I studied very diligently, so I hardly had any time for entertainment. I wasn't the best pupil, though I had a very good command of Russian. I don't remember holidays – maybe only the New

Year and some Soviet holidays, for which demonstrations were arranged – or days-off, as I always studied a lot, even in summer. I was a very serious girl, as a matter of fact.

I remember only the trial over Kamenev [10](#) and Zinoviev [11](#) in 1935. I was grown up by that time and read newspapers. However, I certainly didn't express my thoughts on it, as it wasn't allowed. I remember very well the first elections to the Supreme Soviet. [The first elections to the Supreme Soviet took place in 1937.] Everybody went to school to listen to the radio, which no one had at home, as everyone wanted to hear the results of the elections. We also went to school to listen to the Second Constitution; I was already studying at that time. [The First Constitution of the USSR was adopted in 1924; the Second in 1936.]

I remember my first trip by train. I was about twelve or thirteen years old and I was going to visit my aunt, my mother's younger sister Shura [short for Alexandra], who lived in Donbass. I remember it well, as I had problems with my vestibular apparatus and I was sick.

In 1938 I decided to enter Leningrad State University. I stayed with my elder sister Divora, who was already married to Abram Marshak by that time. They lived in the Petrogradsky District of Leningrad [today St. Petersburg]. Divora studied at the First Medical Institute to become a gynecologist. She simultaneously worked as a laboratory assistant at the State Institute of Chemical Industry. Later I lived with her during the siege [12](#). We were evacuated to Vyatka together afterwards. After the war, Divora gave birth to her elder son, Lev, in 1946 and in 1953 to her younger son, Mikhail. She worked all her life in an antenatal clinic in Leningrad. She died in 1984, several months after the death of her husband. Divora was always a very close friend of mine.

The competition at the Faculty of Biology and Soils was seven persons per position, so it was not easy to enter. There were a lot of exams, not like nowadays. We took exams in political economy, various languages and many other difficult subjects. However, I passed all of them and entered. I lived with my sister or at the university dormitory during that period. It was located in the university yard at that time and was called 'Nauchka.' The living conditions were horrible: 37 people lived in our room. Besides, there were rats there and they jumped on us from the wardrobes. The University Astronomical Time Service is located in that building now. Later I lived in a dormitory on Dobrolyubov Avenue, it was much better.

When I came to the university for the first time, at the end of the university corridor there hung Lenin's [13](#) portrait, depicting him during his external exams. I visited the university not long ago and was surprised very much, as everything has changed there. The corridor is beautifully done and the floor is nicely varnished. There are bookcases with scientific works and portraits of scientists on the walls. I had a very good impression. However, the lecture-rooms are still the same. The only difference is that there used to be a huge aquarium near the sub-faculty of biology, it was enormous, up to the ceiling, with exotic and very rare organisms, not only fish, but also jelly-fish, snakes and turtles; it was destroyed during the war.

I was really lucky, as our year was the last one, when Professor Karpichenko, one of the best Soviet geneticists, held lectures in genetics. He was repressed later in 1939, as his world outlook and especially the content of his lectures were contrary to the [Communist] Party's and Stalin's ideology. The year after that genetics was declared to be a pseudo-science. The Michurin genetics sub-faculty, which propagated Lysenko's ideas, was established instead. This man [Lysenko] lacked

even university education, thus, certainly, his ideas didn't have any relation to the real genetics. The real genetics didn't march in step with the ideology of the Soviet Union Party. The main dogma of the current genetics, as a science, is the statement that everything in an individual is founded initially in the genes and all individual potential, including physical, intellectual and moral, doesn't really depend on the external environment, but rather on inherited qualities. Ideologically it means the following: not all people are equal and the slogan 'If you cannot – we will teach you, if you don't want to – we will force you' doesn't work. Certainly it didn't match with the basic statements of Socialism and Communism. That's why later the genetics in this country was limited to the selection and growing of best plant varieties, advocated by Lysenko. On the whole, we were taught by wonderful scientists and personalities: Dogel [14](#), Zavarzin [15](#), Takhtadzhyan [16](#) and others. After I finished three years of study, the war broke out.

During the war

I remember 22nd June 1941 very well. We didn't suspect anything and we knew nothing. I went shopping with a friend of mine, Berta. Suddenly we realized that there was nothing being sold in the stores. We came out into the street and saw a stand with walnuts; we put a few in a bag, as we didn't have much money. Later we regretted that we took so few. It was broadcasted afterwards that Germany had violated the non-aggression treaty [17](#) and the war had started. I didn't hear it myself unfortunately, because the radio we had in our room at the dormitory didn't work; besides I didn't really care, as I was busy with my summer exams.

On 8th September 1941 the siege of Leningrad started. Some of us were immediately sent to dig trenches, some to be trained as nurses, and some were assigned to work as hospital nurses at the Military-Medical Academy. I was assigned to work at the academy. Later a hospital was arranged at the university and we were transferred there. It was very difficult, but I worked there for a year. I spent the most horrible siege winter of 1941-1942 here, in Leningrad. We received a scholarship at the university, we were paid nothing else, but it was impossible to buy anything with it. At that time I shared a room with my elder sister Divora and her husband. We chose a room with windows in the archway, in order to prevent ourselves from being wounded by pieces of glass in the course of bombing. There was a lot of bombing. One of my cousins wrote me in a letter from some village, 'We are dying of boredom.' And we only looked at the sky and dreamed that the Fascists wouldn't arrive. The Germans were orderly, they came every day at the same time, first after breakfast, then at noon and then about 6pm. At first my sister and I hid under the Trinity Cathedral, there was a bomb-shelter there. Her husband scolded us and said that we shouldn't go there, but we did. He considered that it was very dangerous, as the cathedral was rather far away, more than an hour's walk. Later a bomb hit a place not far from the cathedral and its door got stuck, so that we couldn't get out of the bomb-shelter. From that time on we never went to the shelter.

The university was evacuated on 23rd February 1942 to the town of Saratov. The University operated there during the war and my fellow-students graduated quickly, they got their degree certificates. I completed my education after the war. I joined the university for evacuation with my sister and her husband. However, we didn't reach Saratov; we were taken off the train in Vyatka, as Divora fell very ill: she caught chicken-pox, which she hadn't had as a child. She got a rash on the train and we had to get off at a small transfer station. From Vyatka we went to the place where our parents were staying, the village of Olshanka, Tambov region – the very center of Russia. When we came to the village, we were on the brink of total starvation. We entered a peasant hut and

realized that it was full of grain, up to my ankle. The grain was being dried there.

My parents worked in Olshanka. I also worked in that village: as a school teacher for three years. There were two classes, one for boys and one for girls. It was impossible to work with the boys, they were out of control. I told them, 'If you want to know about Leningrad, I will tell you about it for ten minutes.' So they sat and listened quietly, because they certainly wanted to hear about Leningrad, as it was the cultural center of the Soviet Union, 'the cradle of the Revolution' [18](#), the city of Pushkin [19](#) and something beyond their knowledge, which, as they thought, mere mortals were not given to see in their lives.

My elder cousin, the son of Aunt Riva, my father's sister, Mikhail, left for the frontline. Father – as he was a civil servant in the Tsarist Army before the war – was assigned to Tambov, the center of Russia, in 1943, to work as a manager for some light industry plant. Later he took us from the village to his place. It was in 1943. The Germans didn't reach Olshanka, thank God, and our whole family survived the war.

After the war

During the war I married Zalman Yakovlevich Sakhartov [1905-1977]. He was born in Polotsk [today Belarus], but lived in Leningrad before we met. Zalman was Jewish but not religious. In 1945 my son Boris Zalmanovich Sakhartov was born in Leningrad. I'm sorry, but I don't want to give you details of this part of my life. Please, don't ask me about it. [The interviewee considers it unethical to speak about it, and it is also emotionally difficult for her].

In 1945, when I found out that the university was returning, I went to Saratov and moved back to Leningrad together with my schoolmates. But since all of them had studied during the war in Saratov and I didn't study in Olshanka, I had to catch up on my education, which was not a piece of cake at all.

We lived at my husband's place on Staronevsky Prospect in the very center of Leningrad. He had a room in a communal apartment. Fortunately, we had only one neighbor, a very decent woman. However, there was neither a boiler-room, nor gas in the house. When we bathed our son Boris, we heated the stove, heated the irons on it and then put them into the bath filled with water, in order to make the water hot. Our financial situation was difficult too. I didn't work because of the child, so Zalman had to work very hard. He worked in the sphere of commerce as an accountant. Boris didn't attend kindergarten. I brought him up. In summer we lived in Komarovo, the suburb of Leningrad, we rented a summer house there and spent our summers there starting from 1949 until the end of his school studies in 1962. There Boris made friends with sons of famous actors, Tovstonogov and Kazantsev. [Georgy Tovstonogov directed the Leningrad Big Drama Theater in 1956-1989; Kazantsev was a popular actor in those times.] I was certainly against their friendship, because they were boys of a different social class, who could get anything they wanted, unlike my son. We lived a modest life.

I didn't raise my son according to the Jewish tradition. I mean, he knew that he was a Jew, but he associated this fact only with common anti-Semitism. I'm not religious myself, sometimes I attended the synagogue with Zalman's sister on some holidays, but I understood nothing there. We celebrated only the New Year and the 8th of March [20](#) out of all the Soviet holidays, however, we did it with all the attributes of a true Soviet person: Soviet dry champagne, tangerines, which

appeared in stores only before the holiday, the Salad Olivier and sausage, which was considered a rare delicacy.

I didn't get back to work quickly. Firstly, I had to work at the military college in Peterhof according to my university assignment [21](#), but my husband revolted, saying that I shouldn't work, since it was very difficult to get there, it was a suburb of Leningrad. So I stayed at home and raised my child. Secondly, I faced anti-Semitism for the first time [22](#). When I came to see the school headmaster, I was told, 'We don't accept people with university education'. Though they certainly did, but not Jews. I began to work only in 1958 in high school #165 [23](#). It was located at the place where now some Russian Orthodox Church is being restored. I passed that church every day on my way to work, watched a tree grow on the church roof and thought that soon the building would be destroyed. We had a splendid pedagogical team at school and wonderful pupils. I taught biology, chemistry and astronomy.

Later, in the 1960s, Zalman was appointed manager of a food products' store, we got an apartment and my parents, who had remained in Roslavl after the war, moved in with us. Milya, my sister, graduated from the Pediatric Institute and got married. Her husband Boris was ten years older than her and worked as a teacher in a school with profound study of mathematics. They had two children, Yelena and Lev. Now Yelena is a housewife and Lev has been handicapped since childhood.

My other sister Divora worked at the antenatal clinic all the time. She also had two children: Mikhail and Lev. Lev is now a candidate of chemical science [24](#) and works at the State Institute of Industrial Chemistry. Mikhail is an engineer and works at the Scientific Research Institute of Optics.

In 1962 our son Boris finished school and tried to enter the Faculty of Mathematics and Mechanics at Leningrad State University. Here we faced anti-Semitism again. The fact is that he studied very well, he always got excellent marks for his essays, and suddenly he got a bad mark for his entrance exam essay. When he called and told me about it, I asked the Russian teacher at our school to join me, and we went to the university to take a look at the essay together. But they didn't show it to us. They offered to accept Boris at the part-time faculty without additional exams, but Boris refused and entered the Faculty of Mathematics at the Pedagogical University named after Hertzen. In 1976 Boris immigrated to Los Angeles, America, with his family. I was immediately fired after that [25](#). A year later my husband emigrated there too, but he died en route in Milwaukee of a heart attack.

Personally, I never wanted to emigrate, even now I have no desire to go anywhere, in spite of the fact, that all my best friends have left long ago. I correspond with them now. When my son was leaving, it was impossible: letters reached the addressee only in six months. When my friends emigrated, my heart ached and I understood that the best were leaving. A lot of teachers emigrated from our school alone, with the 'second wave'. [The so-called 'first wave' of emigration was in the 1950s, the 'second wave' took place in the 1970s, and the 'third wave' happened in the 1980s].

In 1970 my father died in his sleep. He was very old by then. We buried him at the Jewish cemetery. The grief sapped my mother's spirits very much, she began to feel ill frequently, became bedridden, and we took care of her. She died of a stroke in 1981. We buried her near our father.

In 1989 my younger sister Milya died of cancer, she was only 59 years old. She continued working at a children's polyclinic until her last days and she died several months before her grandson Lev was born, her daughter Yelena's son.

In 1984 my elder sister Divora died, she was 71 years old. Several months before her death she buried her husband Abram, which was, I think, what really killed her.

My son's son is already grown-up. His name is Ilya, he is 24 years old and he is a programmer. He was eleven the last time I saw him. It was the time of perestroika [26](#) and I was allowed to travel abroad. I spent three months at my son's place in Los Angeles. When I came there, it seemed to me that I had arrived in a different world, everything was so unlike Russia. I liked it there but I couldn't live there: it is a country foreign to me, with a culture of its own, that I cannot understand.

I was never interested in political issues and always preferred to keep silent. I've never been a member of the [Communist] Party and my husband never paid any attention to politics. I was afraid even to think of it. Today, now that it's possible to take an interest in politics and have an opinion of one's own, I keep up with international affairs, especially everything that concerns Israel. I am very much worried about what is happening in the Middle East and consider each terrorist attack in Israel a real tragedy for the whole nation.

I live alone now, but I don't feel lonely, as I have my nephews and nieces, who don't forget me: my sister Divora's son Mikhail and his wife Natalya, as well as my sister Milya's daughter Yelena. They often visit me and call me. Recently, on my 80th birthday, my son visited me with his wife Lora. Nowadays I sometimes attend the synagogue and receive humanitarian aid from Hesed [27](#). I am very grateful for that.

Glossary:

[1](#) 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.

[2](#) Nikolai's army

Soldier of the tsarist army during the reign of Nicholas I when the draft lasted for 25 years.

[3](#) Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement

permanently.

4 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

5 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.

6 Residence permit

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

7 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.

8 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring

both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

9 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.

10 Kamenev, Lev Borisovich (1883-1936)

Soviet communist leader, member of the first Politburo of the Communist Party after the Revolution of 1917. After Lenin's death in 1924, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Kamenev was expelled from the Party in 1927, but he recanted, was readmitted, and held minor offices. He was arrested in 1934 accused of complicity in the murder of Kirov and was imprisoned. In 1936 he, Zinoviev, and 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

11 Zinoviev, Grigory Evseyevich (1883-1936)

Soviet communist leader, head of the Comintern (1919-26) and member of the Communist Party Politburo (1921-26). After Lenin's death in 1924, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Zinoviev was removed from his party posts in 1926 and expelled from the Party in 1927. He recanted and was readmitted in 1928 but wielded little influence. In 1936, he, Kamenev, and 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

12 Blockade of Leningrad

On 8th September 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until 27th January 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

13 Lenin (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

14 Dogel, V

A. (1882 – 1955): a world-wide famous Soviet zoologist who mainly worked in the sphere of protozoology, embryology, parasitology and comparative anatomy of the invertebrate animals.

15 Zavarzin, A

A. (1886 – 1945): one of the most prominent Soviet scientists, the founder of the tissue origin theory, one of the founders of evolutionary histology.

16 Takhtadzhyan, A

L. (1910): a famous Soviet botanist, founder of the system of higher plants and the school of morphologists and plant systematizers.

17 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

18 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

19 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

20 International Women's Day

one of the main Soviet holidays. In the USSR, the 8th of March was considered the day of women's international solidarity in the struggle for economical, social and political equality. In 1965 the Soviet government declared the 8th of March a public holiday; it remains a day off in modern Russia as well. Nowadays the 8th of March is kind of similar to the western holidays such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, as it is a custom to congratulate on this day women of all ages, presenting them flowers, cards and gifts.

21 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

22 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

23 School #

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

24 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

25 Keep in touch with relatives abroad

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

26 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.

27 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint, Hesed helps 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 former Soviet Union 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.