Boris Lesman

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Russia
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Boris Lesman is a Jew, who belongs to the second generation of assimilated families. This assimilation was probably caused by communists, who came to power in 1917; though paternal grandfathers of Boris Lesman did not wear traditional Jewish clothes,
got secular education and spoke Russian (and at the same time they knew Yiddish and Hebrew).

But already his father knew neither Yiddish, nor Hebrew. His mother and grandmother (grandmother lived together with her daughter's family for some time) spoke Yiddish. Despite the assimilation, Boris himself and his son Vitaliy were married to Jewesses, and his father Moissey Lesman was married twice according to soviet traditions (without marriage brokerage) and both his spouses were Jewish.

Paradox of assimilation is behind it:
Boris Lesman was and remains a man without any national prejudices. He calls himself 'a Russian of Jewish origin'.

At present he is 80, but very vigorous, cheerful, and always fond of jokes, but at the same time he is terrifically obliging and responsible.

My family background

I was born in 1923 in Kerch. [Kerch is a seaport in Crimea.]

I know nothing about my distant relatives. In 1915-1917 parents of my mother lived in Kherson, but I am sure that my Mum was born not in Crimea, but in Belarus or in Ukraine. [Kherson is a seaport on the Dnieper River, 30 km far from the Black sea.] It was in 1901.

I keep a book which is handed over from person to person in our family by right of succession. The book Parables of Solomon with comments 'Tohahat haim' by M.Lesman was published in Berdichev at Sheftel printing-house in 1893. The author of the book was Moissey Lesman, my great-grandfather. The title page reads that Moissey Mordekhay Lesman was born in Mogilev on the Dneper River and lived in Melitopol of Taurian province.

I believed that the book was written by one of my grandfather's brothers (probably by Abram Lesman). But I do not know Hebrew and know nothing about the contents of the book.

She spoke very poor Russian. 'I all wet, up to my knees' she used to say (her speech was full of typical Jewish mistakes) having come home from the market when it rained very hard. To us she spoke only Russian: my father could speak not a syllable in Yiddish. And sometimes she spoke to my mother in Yiddish.

When Mum cooked very good pork, she used to say 'Mum, eat it, it is beef.' And my grandmother ate it with pleasure, though she knew it all along (we used to laugh at her, on the sly). We often ate a lot of baked meals: my grandmother and my mother cooked well. I was brought up on chebureks. [Cheburek is a sort of meat pie – typical meal in Crimea and Caucasus.]
I remember not much about my grandmother, because when I was seven she left us for another daughter of hers, who lived in Ukraine, in Pervomaysk. [Pervomaysk is a city of Nikolaev region; it is situated on Yuzhniy Bug River]. Germans appeared there soon. They hang her, as I know, together with my aunt and Naum, my cousin. Their dead bodies were hanging several days: Germans had forbidden taking them down. They put a tablet 'Judas' on them.

My paternal grandfather Boris Moisseevich was a poet. I have a book of his poems issued in 1890. He died very early, at the age of 37, from tuberculosis. I did not know him. And my grandmother Rebecca, as far as I know, was an owner of a bookstore and a stationer's shop. I never saw her and did not know her: she had died before I was born.

My grandfather had 2 brothers: Abram and Semen. They were called in a strange way: Abram 'Brichka' [Four-wheeler] and Semen 'Seriy' [Grey], and I do not know the reason. They lived in Leningrad near the stadium named after Lenin, Zhdanovskaya embankment 3/1, 2nd floor (it is not in the center of the city, but on Petrogradskaya side). [At present Petrogradskaya side is one of the central districts of St. Petersburg.] They had there an eight-room apartment. Later, after the Revolution of 1917 1, when the authorities started reducing space per person in living accommodation [they used to move poor homeless people to rich apartments of bourgeoisie], they

gave four rooms to his relative Boris Zeydeman unbesought. Later Boris left for Tashkent, where he worked in Tashkent conservatoire as a professor (a composer: he was an author of several musical compositions). [Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan.] Before the war they showed film Submarine T9, where he was a composer. Uncle Semen, uncle Abram and Vitalia and Deborah (two sisters of my father) occupied four rooms: Vitalia in the first room, Deborah in the second one, both grandfathers slept in the third room, and the fourth one was their sitting room. They also had a bathroom: they burned wood to heat it, because there was no central heating. But they had electricity supply (they lived in Leningrad, thank goodness!). There also was a large kitchen and two corridors.

They had a housemaid. Oh, no: they had a servant! At that time there were no housemaids, only servants, and I do not remember her name. She was Russian, she had lived at them for hundred years (from her childhood to her death). By that time she was already very old: a good bit older than both my uncles (and they were about seventy or even older …). But she was full of mischief! I remember her, when she was younger. I knew her for about ten years: possibly from 1930s. And I do not remember when she died. She was very slim, short, but full of mischief! She practically became a family member. She cooked, washed, and cleaned, and also helped me to take a bath. She used to heat the bathroom and say ‘Let’s go! Let’s take a bath!’ She was there to order about; she was the mistress of the house. She was paid for her job, moreover: when we came back or left the house, uncle Abram always told my father ‘Moissey, have you given money?’ It was always an extra sum of money. And my father used to leave money somewhere on the table (he never delivered anything into anybody’s hands). Uncle Abram kept vigilant watch over it.

Abram Moisseevich was one of the most devout Jews in the town. Russian tsar Nicolas II [2] held him in high respect and offered him a post of minister (sure, in case he denied his faith and accepted Christianity), but my uncle refused.

He wore ordinary (secular) clothes (a suit of clothes and a tie); he had no payes; He was very handsome, he had long gray hair, moustache and a beard. At that time all men had beards, and uncle Semen had it, too. Uncle Abram celebrated all Jewish holidays; he could read Hebrew well; he was religious. And uncle Semen was not so religious, but he took part in celebration of all holidays.

Polina, the wife of Abram Moisseevich (Polina Lesman) died, when I was a little boy: I did not know her. Judging from her photos, she was a real beauty.

The wife of Semen Moisseevich left for France together with an officer, she deserted her husband Semen and their son. It happened during the revolutionary days of 1917. And they never spoke about her. I never saw her.

Abram Moissevich died in 1937. And uncle Semen was evacuated from the besieged Leningrad during the war. After the end of the war he returned back to Leningrad and lived together with the son Moissey. He died here, in Leningrad in 1950s.

My father’s name was Moissey Borissovich. He was born in 1899 in Melitopol (Ukraine), if I am not mistaken. My mother’s name was Millerman Anna Naumovna. She was born in 1901.

After the revolution of 1917, in 1920s my father worked in GPU (State Political Department) 3 as an investigator (he was a lawyer); and my Mum worked as a typist and a secretary in our soviet revolutionary bodies. And when White Army soldiers 4 came to Kherson (where she lived and worked at that time), she was arrested. She was kept in prison and was sentenced to death. Later the White Guard 5 members were dislodged, she was released from the prison, and my father got acquainted with her holding an investigation. They got married in 1921 or 1922.

My father had no juridical education. He studied at the Aircraft Engineering College in tsarist Russia, but did not graduate from it. We have his photo in pilot's uniform: civil, not military. After the revolution of 1917 he studied at some juridical courses and later worked as a legal adviser at different institutions. My mother only finished school, because in 1917 she was 16 years old - and reorganization of the country already started. She worked as a typist, and after her marriage she did not work, she was a housewife.

My father and my mother were not religious, because they were brought up and lived among Russians. My mother knew Yiddish. Both my father and I did not. I understand Yiddish a little, because I knew German well. We did not speak Hebrew at all. My grandmother left, and members of our family started speaking only Russian. Among those relatives of my fathers, whom I was acquainted with, only uncle Abram was extremely religious, in contrast to my father's brothers and sisters.

My Mum died very young in 1935 in Kerch. After the death of my mother I remained with my father. Several years later he married a Jewess; her name was Dorah Isaacovna Shuster (probably later she changed her surname for Lesman). Her family members also did not celebrate any religious holidays. We lived in Kerch. Dorah Isaacovna was very nice to me. She died very young from blood cancer in Chapaevsk, where they were evacuated together with my father. [Chapaevsk is a small city in Samara region. From the beginning of 1920s they produced there chemical weapon, for example, mustard gas. The production process was not accompanied by any sanitary actions, and resulted in monstrous pollution of environment. Practically, the city became unsuitable for life; however manufacturing was not closed. They had to replace all employees of the factory approximately every three months. Three months period was enough for a healthy man to become an invalid. At present in Chapaevsk they produce explosives. The situation with sanitary norms did not change a lot, and half of the citizens suffer from oncological diseases. The city is recognized to be a zone of ecological disaster (http: // www.svoboda.org).]

After the end of the war my father worked in Simferopol (Crimea) in regional consumers union. [Simferopol is a large city in the south of Crimea.] He was an extremely good lawyer – even Moscow lawyers invited his suggestions. He died at the age of 96 in Leningrad. All his life he lived in Crimea and only his last five years he spent here. He died in 1995.

My paternal grandfather (Boris Moisseevich, a poet) had 6 children: 4 brothers and 2 sisters. All of them lived and died in Leningrad.

The senior brother Samuil was born in 1897 (but I am not sure). He lived in Leningrad (at that time Petrograd); he was called up for military service in tsatist army, where he was an ensign (a junior lieutenant). To tell the truth, he became an officer in haste – just like me when I became a

lieutenant two months after the war burst out. After the end of the war he was not subjected to repression [at that time Soviet authorities annihilated officers of the tsarist army], because he did not fight against Red Army 6. But as he was a tsarist army officer, he was deprived of some rights: in 1920s he could not find work and managed to get fixed up in a job of photographer in a photostudio. He died here in Leningrad in 1970s (it seems to me that it happened in 1973). His wife Maria (I do not remember her patronymic, for me she was aunt Marussya) was a Jewess, a doctor, a major of medical service, chief of a hospital train. Their daughter Adelaida was born in 1922. She died in Leningrad two years ago, in 2002. She lived not far from here. Her husband Andrey Kossenko, a Ukrainian, was a radiologist. She also was a radiologist – and they got acquainted. He died a bit before his wife also here in Leningrad. They had a daughter.

Their second brother was my father.

The third brother Emanuil (we called him Manila) was born in 1901. I think I am right, because my father was born in 1899, and Emanuil was the third son. He was a splendid chess player: he managed to trim Botvinnik at chess several times, when Botvinnik was young. [Botvinnik was a well known USSR world champion in chess.] A journal named Chess Bulletin remained intact somewhere at ours, where there was a series of photos named ‘Emanuil Lesman’s Display of Multi-Board Chess in Berlin’. He was acquainted with Kapablanka. [Khose Raul Kapablanka, a Cuban, was one of the world champions in chess.] He also knew Lasker and Reshevsky (American grand masters and champions). Uncle Manila worked at the Electrossila factory. [Electrossila factory was one of the largest electrotechnical enterprises in the USSR.] He died here, in Leningrad, from starvation, during the siege 7. I was the last one from our family to see him, because all the family members had been evacuated, but him: he was going to leave Leningrad together with Electrossila employees a bit later. I used to visit him in his apartment in Michurinskaya Street. Last time I brought him crackers and 2 packs of tobacco (I received it as I was a cadet). I said ‘Uncle, I am leaving tomorrow.’ I remember him together with his neighbour sitting on the stove, trying to get warm. They had all their clothes on, because it was terribly cold in the apartment. It was in December, I was evacuated in December 1941, and he had to leave a couple of days later together with the factory staff. And as I got to know from documents, he died literally several days after our last meeting.

The fourth was Vitalia Lesman, a great architect: there are a lot of buildings constructed according to her project in Sverdlovsk and one or two buildings in Leningrad. [Sverdlovsk is a large industrial center in Urals, nowadays Ekaterinburg.]

The fifth was Deborah Lesman. She was a pianist. At first she lived in Leningrad (Petrograd), during the war she was in evacuation (I do not remember where). Later she lived somewhere else, and returned to Leningrad after a ten-year period. She died in Leningrad.

They both were single. They died in 1970s.

And the last son was Isaac – uncle Isya. He was a head of some department in the tram depot named after Leonov. He survived during the siege of Leningrad and died from heart attack in 1970s. He lived in Vassilievsky Island. [Vassilievsky Island is one of the central islands in St. Petersburg.] One day he left his apartment to buy some bread and died in the street. His wife

Valentina Vostryak, a Jewess died in 2002. Their son Vladimir died at the age of 50 from the serious illness: disseminated sclerosis. At present his wife Barbara lives in America together with her second husband, and their son Sasha lives in Switzerland.

Semen Moissevich had a son Moissey, who was a book-hunter. When the war burst out, he left Leningrad and left his vast collection. The collection was robbed: there were no Germans in the city, but our people did their best. When he returned, he started his collection anew. His collection was tremendous: if I am not mistaken he had about ten thousand issues. And he did not collect his books indiscriminately: he did his best to collect autographes. I saw there originals (decisions and orders), signed personally by Peter the Great 8 and Nicolas II. I remember well the signature of Alexander I: Alexander, then hooks, squiggles and flourish and Roman number I at the end. [Peter the Great, Nicolas II and Alexander I were Russian tzars of different times.] Besides uncle Semen gathered a unique collection of subjects from archive of Arakcheev: books, letters, and documents! [Arakcheev was a well-known statesman in the time of Alexander I.] He handed it over without any compensation to our Leningrad Public Library. I asked him ‘Uncle, why didn‘t you sell it? Why didn‘t you leave it at home?’ And he answered ‘I can’t keep these great people at me, I gave them away.’ He also gathered a large collection of Lenin’s 9 original documents and also presented them free-of-charge to the museum of Lenin in Ulyanovsk. This deed brought him the title of a freeman of Ulyanovsk: they awarded him a special ribbon and a diploma. He used to say ‘Well, Lenin was a genius of mankind, how could I keep his documents at me?’ And he knew each book very well: not only its contents, but also all its background.

He graduated from a conservatoire as a pianist. He worked as a concertmaster at the Leningrad Philarmonic Society. But the lion’s share of his time belonged to his collection, and when he retired at the age of 60, he devoted all his time to his collection.

I have been acquainted with him since I realized myself: approximately since 1930s, when I was 6 years old. We met each other very often: he always visited my uncle Abram on holidays and came to see my father. I remember him to be a cheery fellow and a joker (and a very clever person). We liked to make fun together. He used to come to my place and say ‘Boris, do you know any new anecdotes?’ I said ‘No.’ And he answered ‘But I know! Do you want me to tell it?’ And he started telling me one of his spicy stories.

In my mother’s family there were also 6 children: four sisters and two brothers. I knew not all of them.

Semen was one of my mother’s brothers. As far as I remember, he was a high-ranker somewhere on Sakhalin (I guess, director of a fish-factory). After his retirement, he lived in Kharkov. He died at the end of 1970s or in 1980s.

Her second brother Lev was the youngest. Lev was the only one of them whom I was on informal terms with. The others were not so close to me. He lived at us in Kerch (in our family). He was a bookkeeper, a financier. During the war at the front he was a chief of financial department at some division (a captain, later a major). After the end of the war he got ill with cancer and died young in 1952.

His wife Galina Simkina was a Jewess. They have 2 daughters: Valentina (named in honour of my grandmother Velya) and Anna (named in honour of my Mum). They lived in Leningrad not far from the Winter Palace. [Winter Palace is the former residence of Russian tsars, at present it houses the world famous museum the Hermitage.] I often visited them. Lev adored me. We found each other here in Leningrad by pure accident. After his death I went on visiting his family. Valentina married a French person, whose name was Patrick. They were students of the University here in Leningrad, and got acquainted with each other. They got married and left for Paris, where they live now. They have got a son Daniel (my nephew); I saw him, because they came by car from Paris to see us (they visited us two or three times several years hand-running). Patrick speaks Russian well; Daniel knows both Russian and French. But now we do not communicate any more. As far as I know, Anna together with her mother (my aunt and a wife of Lev) left for Israel after collapse of the USSR 10. It seems to me that later they left Israel for Paris. At present I know nothing about their location. To my mind, Anna has got a son, whom I never saw.

One sister of my mother (aunt Sofia) was hung in Pervomaysk together with my grandmother and my brother Naum, who was 16 or 17 years old at that time (he did not manage to evacuate). Sofia was an economist and a Communist Party leader. They lived together with my grandmother and I visited them once. There was Bug River near by, and I remember that I went to Bug for swmming.

Her elder sister (my aunt Vera) lived in Odessa together with her husband. She died there after the end if the war. [Odessa is a city in Ukraine on the western coast of the Black sea.] She worked somewhere (I do not remember the place, but I know for sure that she was not a housewife). I guess her son Leonid is still alive – last time I met him in 1975 or 1976 in Odessa. At present I have no idea about the place of his residence: we do not correspond. I also visited Leonid and his father after my aunt’s death. His father Yanya was a Jew. Their surname was Moukomel.

I saw my mother’s younger sister Elizaveta only once, when I was a little boy. Before the war she lived in Odessa 11, during the war she was in evacuation in Tashkent, and remained there. She died in 1980s.

You see, I know my maternal relatives not so well. I know for sure, that all of them were not religious. But I maintained close contact with my paternal relatives: we visited them in Leningrad together with my Mum, when she was alive.

All Lesmans lived in Leningrad, except us. We lived in Kerch, in a communal flat 12. We had two rooms, and there were two families of our neighbors (i.e. two rooms more in the flat). Anteroom was very large – about 40 square meters. It also served as a common kitchen: a kerosene stove was situated there. Of course, there was no bathroom, no water supply. There was a water-pump in our court yard – some sort of an old-fashioned waterpipe: we had to carry pailfuls of water to the second floor. We had to go to a bath-house to wash ourselves. Toilet was situated in the corner of our court yard, of course, it was common. There was electricity supply, strange as it may seem.

In the first room to the right from the entrance there lived a lonely girl, who was sometimes visited by men at night. Some guy lived at her for a short period of time, later he disappeared somewhere, and after that another young guy came to her place. I remember it well, because I was a child and I saw them coming and leaving. The second room was occupied by a couple with a daughter. Their

daughter was my coeval, but she studied not at my school, therefore I was not in touch with her.

And the rest two rooms were occupied by our family. The second wife of my father had a child, whose surname was Ghin (the surname of her first husband Ghin). He was nine years younger than me (born in 1932, probably in Kerch); and we lived together with him in the same room: his bed, my bed. My father together with Dorah Isaacovna lived in the other room. We had neither servants, nor baby-sitters.

Dorah Isaakovna died in evacuation, and my father took care of that boy. Once in 1950s his mother's sister came to us and took him away to Chelyabinsk. [Chelyabinsk is a city in the Urals, 200 kilometers far from Kazakhstan border.] For some time he studied in the Leningrad Shipbuilding College, but to my mind he graduated from a Building College in Moscow. He is an engineer.

At present he lives in New York and everything has turned out all right in his life: in 1989 he received a special certificate of The Best Engineer of New York, a brass plate, $5,000 and increase of salary. He engineers bridges. He has 2 sons. Andrew is a son of his wife (a Jewess), his father was Russian. The second son is Vadim. Vadim is a very good guy. When I visited them in New York (in the beginning of 1990), he studied in the 11th class, and by now he has already graduated from the university. He played piano very well, touring the USA. At present I am not in touch with them. Visiting New York, I went to synagogue for the first time in my life. Its building was rather roomy, there were two floors, but I had not visited any other synagogues and had no chance to compare.

Growing up

I am sure that in Kerch there were no synagogues! [The interviewee is mistaken: in Kerch there still remain buildings of several synagogues.] And nobody talked about it! There were tatar mosques. And in Crimea there were a lot of Greeks. On the third floor of our house there lived a former Consul of Greece (a retired consul, as it seems to me now). His name was Jordan Simelidi. He lived there together with his sister Ekaterina. She was a school teacher, but not at my school. It was Jordan Simelidi, who educated my taste in philately. He also was a very good artist, he painted my mother's portrait, and he also presented her a miniature: a sea and a sailing ship. Their family was very good.

On the first floor of our house there lived Kostya Manioti, my coeval. We were friends. On the second floor (in the other wing of our house) there lived Aphrodite, my youthful sweetheart.

Another girl I loved (one among many) was Elza Kelzon. And she loved me, too. She came to our school in the second class; she was a Jewess, born in Kerch. Her cousin Misha also studied with us; during the war he was lost at the front. Elza married our schoolmate Ilya Babich, a Jew. They named their son Ilya. Later they divorced and Ilya Babich lived in Moscow, and she lived in Kerch. But their son suffered from heart disease. At the age of 17 he was brought by Elza to Moscow to go through surgery, but died during operation. Later Elza married a person from Kharkov, who moved to Kerch specially, and their life was very good.

At that time children went to school at the age of 8. My school was very good, it was named after Zhelyabov, a Russian revolutionary, a member of the Executive committee of Narodnaya Volya Organization (in 1860s he lived in Kerch). It was situated far from our house, though according to Leningrad criteria it was very close to us: I had to go down, walk along Lenin Street and turn to the seashore. In Leningrad I went to school by tram, and in Kerch there was only one tram route: the tram went to a plant. The plant was famous for its large blast-furnaces. When they finished cast at night, we saw bright light as clear as daylight. The plant was situated 10 or 12 kilometers far from Kerch, and in 1939 or 1940, before the war 13, they arranged tramway from the Kerch railway station to the plant, because a lot of its workers lived in Kerch. Actually, it was not city, but local tramway. I used it extremely rarely.

Before the war we had no idea about private automobiles, there were only official cars and trains. I often went to Leningrad by train, because all my paternal relatives lived there. My father always took me with him to Dnepropetrovsk: he often went there on business trips. [Dnepropetrovsk is a city on Dnieper River; at present it is a Ukraine regional center.] He also took me with him to Odessa and somewhere else. To Leningrad we always went by train; there was a train Kerch-Moscow with one carriage Kerch-Leningrad. I remember that in Jankoy they hooked it on to another train Feodosiya-Leningrad and we continued our way. [Jankoy is a town and a large railway junction in the north of Crimea.]

At the age of 6 or 7 I started my music studies. I was not a schoolboy yet, I visited a kindergarten. My father hired a teacher for me: she used to come to us. We had a grand piano at home. I studied under the whiplash. I remember my Mum sitting beside me, holding a long ruler in her hands. When my friends cried from the street ‘Boris! Come out!’, she stroke on my hands with the ruler ‘Bang!’. That was the way I studied music. You see, our life events were concentrated in the street. I had a lot of friends not only among my schoolmates; there were many street guys, but no hooligans. We were very friendly: ran and played like other boys.

We also used to go to the cinema: there were two cinema houses in Kerch. They showed only soviet films: at that time there were no foreign films, they appeared after the end of the war: German, English, and American captured films. And before the war we watched Chapaev 14, Seven Courageous Polar Explorers and other soviet films.

I took some interest in philately and liked to read Jules Verne and Belyaev. At home we had a lot of books. My father liked books, he always bought them. And it was important that we had an acquaintance at the bookshop. You see, when I was a schoolboy, there was a girl (my classmate). I was an excellent pupil, and she was an excellent pupil, too. Her name was Assya Ryssina. So, at the end of 1930s her father was director of that shop. And it was he who worked for my grandmother before 1917. I knew that father of Assya Ryssina was the former worker of my grandmother, and later (in 1935, 1937, and 1939) he was the director.

The shop was large; it was situated in the main street of Kerch named after Lenin. I remember that there was only one room (a large hall), where there were bookshelves and a writing-desk. I visited that place very often: I bought there textbooks. When there appeared new books, Assya Ryssina used to say ‘Daddy asked me to tell you that some new books came.’ You know, there was shortage of books, to tell the truth, at that time there was shortage of everything. We had different

books: fantasy, fiction. In 1930s there were no subscription editions. We had no old books. We subscribed to newspapers Crimean Truth (regional newspaper), Kerch Worker. All these newspapers were in Russian. There was no idea about Jewish language in Crimea, and of course no publications. But they issued books in Tatar language, because Crimea was a Tatar territory. We studied Tatar language at school.

During the war

Assya Ryssina was a Jewess. I do not know, what happened to her. After we finished school in 1941, I left and we did not communicate. I do not know, whether she survived the war or not (in Kerch fascists shot more than 7,000 Jews).

Alexander Turchinsky was a very good guy, a Jew. He was an excellent pupil, but some sort of Jewish dawdle: he perished at the front.

There were a lot of Jews at our school: Boris Benkler, Irina Kompaneets, Sofa Berman.

Boris Benkler was badly wounded at the front. Later he became a head physician at the hospital in Tyumen, an honoured physician of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, and was awarded an Order of Labour Red Banner. [Tyumen is a city in the Urals.] [Honoured physician of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was a honorary title for the most distinguished persons.] [Order of Labour Red Banner they gave for feat of working.] At present he is dead already: he had a bad heart.

Irina Kompaneets married Nikolay Babich. He was also our schoolmate, Russian, and she was a Jewess. By now he has already died, and she lives in Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg now). One more Jewish-Russian couple was Sofa Berman and Ivan Vlesko, they lived in Kerch.

We knew that we were Jews, but we did not pay much attention to it: we were russianized. I remember that colleagues of my father always called him Mikhail Borissович, it became the custom. And when I joined Komsomol organization 15 in 1930s I wrote in the questionnaire ‘Lesman, Boris Mikhailovich, a Jew’ (they always insisted to indicate nationality). Later I accidentally got to know that I was Boris Moisseevich. I came to my Daddy and asked ‘Daddy, are you Moissey or Mikhail?’ He answered ‘My name is Moissey.’ – ‘If you are Moissey, it means that I am Moisseevich!’ And I thought I was Boris Mikhailovich! So, when they exchanged Komsomol-membership cards, I told everybody with pride ‘I am Boris Moisseevich!’ Since then I was not Mikhailovich, but Moisseevich. And my father was called Mikhail until his last days. But I still remember my horror when I got to know his real name! ‘Daddy, are you Moissey?!’ I remember it very well. So I am Boris Moisseevich and I am not ashamed of my patronymic.

In Kerch I knew no religious Jews. All of them were russianized. We did not celebrate Jewish holidays, until now I know nothing about them. In Kerch we lived among Russians. Only my grandmother knew Yiddish. But she always talked Russian to me, therefore neither I, nor my father knew Yiddish. When she talked to Mum, I understood ‘kushen tohas’.

I was in touch with my paternal relatives, and uncle Abram celebrated Jewish holidays. I remember special biscuits – hamantashen? One day uncle Abram gathered all members of our family to celebrate one of Jewish holidays. We were children: two my sisters [cousins] and I. Uncle Abram invited all brothers and sisters with their spouses and children – about 30 persons. There was no bread on a table, only matzot, and sweets were also made from matzah. The table was laid perfectly. A special table was laid for children in another room and a housemaid brought us meals. Of course, there was gefilte fish, chopped herring (looked like caviar) to spread bread with. The first course was meat or chicken.

In Crimea we knew nothing about matzah. I got to know about it in Leningrad. For about a year I studied there at school and lived at my grandfathers Abram and Semen. It happened because a year or a year and a half after my mother's death my father decided to move to Leningrad, because all his relatives already lived there. Therefore I was taken to Leningrad beforehand and went to school on the 1st of September (to the 5th class). Later my father changed his mind and took me back to Kerch; therefore I finished my school in Kerch.

Near by there lived Igor Lekney, a Lithuanian. He lived in Kerch together with his aunt, because his mother and father had been arrested as enemies of the people 16. It happened in 1930s. I do not know the way he appeared in Kerch. I only know that in Leningrad he had an aunt, too. And you know that I often visited Leningrad, especially in summer during summer vacation. There we used to meet with him. I remember that once (in 1939 or 1940) we went to Petrodvorets, we started at 5 p.m. and somewhere by 3 o'clock in the night we already got tired and lay down to have a sleep under a tree on our way there (it was warm in summer). We slept a little and went home about 7 o'clock in the morning. [Petrodvorets is a suburb of St. Petersburg, full of fountains; it used to be a summer residence of Russian emperors.] All night long we chattered. Igor married Lora Gankina – our classmate, too. She was a great specialist in financies: during the Olympic Games of 1980 she (already a pensioner!) was invited specially to be the main financier of the Olympic Games. She was awarded an Order of Honour after the Games. And Igor Lekney worked as director of the famous Olympic swimming pool Chaika; he was an Honoured Worker of Culture of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (a special title for distinguished workers). Igor Lekney has already died, and Lora Gankina is alive, now she lives in Moscow.

It is funny that many couples from our class got married! But it happened already after the end of the war - and before the war we were afraid even to touch each other! We were extremely naive: already at the age of 18 we knew nothing about sexual relations between a man and a woman. During our parties we rotated the famous 'bottle' and left for a dark room (it was a game for children: according to its rules a chosen pair had to kiss). I went there with one of my classmates, but I was afraid to touch her; we stood still there for 2 or 3 minutes and went back. Of course we danced, gathered at different apartments. We danced tango, rumba, and boston.

At school we had lessons of manual training: metalwork and joinery. A teacher of joinery was a Jew, his surname was Rokhlis.

Our teacher of physics became a professor at Pedagogical College in Simferopol after the end of the war.

Director of our school was very good. He was Russian, Alexander Tretyakov. He was ten years older than us. We loved him very much and were in touch with him up to present day; by now he is 95 or 96 years old. As for me, he stopped writing me letters about three years ago.

Rosa Kheifets, a Jewess was a teacher of literature - she adored me! We called her ‘Molecule’: she was knee-high to a duck. I quess, she was not taller than 1.5 meters. During the war she was in evacuation, but later she returned to Kerch, taught children at school and later retired on a pension.

I also took great interest in water tourism and gymnastics. I was a good gymnast: in 1940 I managed to become a champion of Crimea in gymnastics. I achieved ranking in gymnastics, and in 1941 I started working to become a master of sports, but the war burst out... Gymnastics is a perfect kind of sport; I was able to turn somersaults here and there. I belonged to Vodnik sports society; I was a member of their team. But in future I was going to become a sailor.

Though I played piano, I rarely took part in amateur perfomances: I did not like to act on a stage. When a military college student, I played in cadets’ jazz band. But in the beginning of 1942 I left for front line.

But when Eddie Rozner’s jazz band from Poland appeared in the Soviet Union, I went crazy with it! Eddie Rosner was trumpet-player number two in the world, after Louis Armstrong! And as for me, I considered myself to be a musician at the very least ...

When I studied at school, it was very fashionable to be a member of aviation club! I entered aviation club being a pupil of the 10th class (at the age of 17). They did not allow younger schoolchildren to become its members. They used U-2 planes. I finished the theoretical course and flied together with instructor. But by that time I already handed in my documents to a military college and gave up aviation. At that time everything connected with aviation was in fashion, for instance Tsiolkovsky. I did not read his works; I only knew that there was Tsiolkovsky, a teacher at Kaluga school. [Tsiolkovsky was a well-known Russian scientist and inventor (1857-1935).] At that time very famous were soviet pilots Chkalov 17, Baidukov, Belyakov, Gromov, Kokkinaki, Grizodubova, Raskina, and Ossipenko. Everybody got really crazy about them!

During vacations we walked all over the southern Crimea, beginning from Kerch and finishing in Evpatoria. [Evpatoria is a city-port on the western coast of Crimea.] Once (I remember it well) three of us went from Kerch to Feodosiya by bikes. We started early in the morning and arrived in Feodosiya in the evening; but we daren't get back by bikes and went by train. And it was a long way from Kerch to Feodosiya – so cheerful guys we were! One of us, Vova Khomutov was lost during the war; and I do not remember the name of the other one. We also went on foot from Simeiz to Alupka, through Yalta. I remember that we visited the palace of Bukhara emir, situated in Yalta. [Simeiz, Alupka and Yalta are towns on the southern coast of Crimea.]

In Kerch there was a perfect beach (fifteen minutes by bus from our place) in a small settlement on the Black Sea shore. We went there for swimming. We also went for swimming to the Azov Sea in Enikale.

At that time we had only 2 holidays: the 1st of May and the 7th of November 18, nothing else. And I had my birthday on the 1st of May! We did not celebrate the New Year day: it was not a day off, it was forbidden to decorate New Year trees. Only in 1938 Stalin permitted it. We used to celebrate holidays participating in demonstrations. After that we came home and had dinner. That was all.

When the World War II burst out, we did not attach importance to it. Probably, it happened because we were boys, not adults.

On June 14, 1941 I finished my school, on June 22 we were going to hold a meeting in celebration of it, but that day the war burst out. They cancelled our banquet, gave us urgently our certificates, and that was all. Approximately for a week I stayed in Kerch, and Komsomol leaders appointed me to be a company commander. We participated in patroling the city streets (2 or 3 men together). And a week later I left for Leningrad. Here I entered the Naval School named after Frunze 19. I sent there my document beforehand, in 1940. That School celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2001 (it is older, than St. Petersburg itself, because it was created in 1701, and St. Petersburg - in 1703). According to the decree of the President Eltsin it was renamed Naval College of Peter the Great.

Seamen were always rich, having 8 variants of uniform. No.1 - white trousers, white jacket with high collar and white cap; no.2 - black trousers, white jacket with high collar; no.3 - black trousers, black jacket with high collar and black cap; no.4 - no.3 + pea-jacket; no.5 - no.3 + overcoat and sailor's cap or uniform cap; no.6 - the same + fur-cap; no.7 - the same + tied up fur-cap; no.8 - a sheepskin.

I had a lot of friends at the College: Markin Eugeny (he died already); Pautov Nikolay (he lives in Petrodvorets); Alexander Zaharov (he died); Baboshin Eugeny (handicapped: he lost his leg at the front; he has already died); Chernov Yury (he was a member of Association of Writers: he managed to graduate from the Literary College in Moscow after retirement in the rank of captain, he died already); Novimzon Abram (we served together on the Black sea (in Kerch), later he served in Vladivostok, and I went to Kamchatka, and we met in Vladivostok several times. Later we moved to Leningrad, and he visited me million times. Now he lives in Haifa). We use to gather at the Naval School every year on the 9th of May (to celebrate the Victory Day).

Before war my father worked as a civilian legal adviser at a military training ground, which was based near Kerch. As my father was not subject to call because of his disease, in 1941 he together with his wife and child was evacuated to Chapaevsk of Kuybyshev region. [Kuybyshev is a city in Urals, Samara at present.]

I entered the Naval School on July 3, as soon as I arrived from Kerch, and in August I was already at the front, here in Leningrad. I was a machine gunner (they changed our cloths for infantry uniform). At the end of September they brought us back to Leningrad and changed our uniform for naval one. We starved in blockade for three months, till December 9. On December 9, 1941 we were brought to Ladoga Lake [39 km far from St. Petersburg]. The Lake was already ice-bound, and 1 day and a half we went on foot across the Ladoga Lake to Kobona. [Kobona is a settlement on the east coast of the Ladoga Lake, where they accepted people evacuated from the besieged Leningrad.] And we happened to loose our way at night walking through the ‘ice desert’ and went towards German positions. We were lucky to be noticed and set on the right way by ski patrols of

the Road of Life 20.

We walked about 50 km across the Ladoga Lake: it was terribly windy and frosty. On my left there walked Sergey Akhromeev (later he became a USSR Marshal and a Hero of the Soviet Union 21), and on my right – Evgeniy Markin. All of us were cold and lousy, because we had no opportunity to wash. We suffered from starvation! During the hardest period of the siege people received 125 grammes of bread per day, and we got 250 gr. From Kobona we went on foot to Tikhvin. [Tikhvin is a city 140 km far from the Ladoga Lake; front line went across Tikhvin.] At that time Tikhvin was recaptured and was full of corpses: both German and Soviet. We were told to take away corpses. They promised to give us supplementary ration for it. We did it and received half-pack of porridge concentrate and two small bits of sugar each. In Tikhvin we got into the train and moved to Astrakhan: our School had been already evacuated there. [Astrakhan is a city in the Delta of the Volga River.]

It took us a month to get to Astrakhan by train. We got terribly dirty - black! But we were well fed, in compare with Leningrad.

We arrived in Astrakhan on 10th January 1942. Immediately from the railway station we were brought to bath-house, they gave us clean uniform and took to our School. And we started our studies. At first I studied at the command faculty. But soon we got to know that a lot of students from Hydrographic school perished on the ice of Ladoga Lake. Therefore in Astrakhan they offered us to change the faculty in case we wished. I agreed to change for hydrographic department, because I wanted to get engineering education.

Having finished the first course, we went for practice to a village near Astrakhan. As far as I was a specialist in hydrography, I fulfilled topographical survey.

By that time German troops approached Volga (Stalingrad, Volgograd at present). Our School students immediately finished their practical studies and moved to Baku. But we, specialists in topography (‘educated’ already after a year of studies) were made lieutenants: those who had not very good marks for exams became junior lieutenants, and those who had good and excellent marks (like me, for example) became lieutenants. And we were sent to Stalingrad hell 22. It was the time of the famous Stalingrad battle. By the way, not all students, specialists in hydrography were sent to the front line (only 28 from 100). And the rest 72 did not participate.

Most of all I was afraid of being captured: I was Jewish, a Communist Party member, an officer. I joined the Communist Party at the front; I went into actions crying ‘For our native land! For Stalin!’ We had no idea that Stalin was a devil incarnate. And we knew nothing about ideology of Fascism.

November 19 became the Day of Artillery and Rocket Troops, because it was the day of full-scale offensive in Stalingrad. I was a lieutenant, an assistant of company commander, but by the end of the day I already became a company commander. Statistics tells us that during that battle, a terrible, a dreadful battle platoon leader commanders lived 3 days. On the fourth day they were either killed or wounded; company commanders lived 7 days. I became a company commander and managed to drag out my life from November 19 till December 2. The temperature was 30 degrees below zero, and we wore thin socks and naval boxcalf boots. We were in field caps! 30

degrees below zero!

I went to commissary and asked to give me a pistol. They gave me a rifle, an old Russian rifle, rusty. Sergeant fired it several times to clean it and gave it to me. ‘I am a lieutenant.’ – ‘Procure a gun in action! We have no pistols!’ To tell the truth, by evening 18 people remained from 100, and only 1 officer – me. So, I was a company commander, I was a platoon leader commander, and I was a section leader at the same time. There was no place to take cover: it was impossible to dig trenches, because the ground was frozen – that was the way we ‘amused ourselves’.

There I got my feet and hands frostbitten and also was wounded - therefore in the hospital they treated me both for my wound and for chilblain. A German sniper managed to take aim at us: we had to lie down on the ground covered with snow; we could not move our hands or legs (he would have shot us). And we were underclad… We had to lie still till dark. We were two: I and a political officer 23 lieutenant Diveykin. Our hands and feet got absolutely frostbitten: we were in boxcalf boots and in rag gloves – not suitable for winter conditions. And only after dark we started rolling over and crawling away. At that time the sniper wounded me in the buttock by an explosive bullet. And the same bullet caused a fatal wound in the stomach of Diveykin. When we reached our positions, we were brought to a hospital. In the hospital a doctor looked at me (I was 19 years old – a child) and said to a soldier ‘Bring him (me) to the operating-room, and take that guy over there.’ – ‘Where?!’ – ‘Over there, I said: he is dead.’ On our way to the hospital he spoke to me, he called me ‘lieutenant’! So, I was quickly operated, and Diveykin…

They took me away to Uralsk to a hospital, where I spent a month and several days. [Uralsk is a city in Kazakhstan.] After that I left hospital and went to the front via Saratov. [Saratov is a city on the Volga River.] In Saratov I spent a day or two. And once early in the morning I was walking to Saratov railway station to learn about the departure time of the train from Saratov to Stalingrad front (in south direction). And I was walking along an empty street (January, 7 o’clock in the morning, snowstorm) and suddenly saw a figure across the street: that was my uncle Lev! Can you imagine that it could happen during the war, at 7 o’clock in the morning! I embraced him. He was a junior lieutenant, I was a lieutenant. We embraced and kissed ‘Where are you from?’ – ‘I am from hospital. And you?’ – ‘I go from the Caucasus (Germans were already in the Caucasus by January 1942) to our headquarters to get informed about my destination.’ – ‘Do you have a place to live here?’ – ‘No, I don’t’ – ‘Come with me!’ And we spent 2 days together with him. Later I left Saratov, but I gave him my father’s address in Chapaevsk, and through my father we found each other: got to know our field mail addresses.

It was my first wound. I have got to Stalingrad front. By that time Paulus troops had already been encircled, but not taken yet. So I was moving to the south by train. I was lying on the upper berth (my wound still bothered me). Three officers were sitting below: two lieutenants and one junior lieutenant. They were talking, suddenly I looked at that junior lieutenant … and understood that I knew him! ‘Konstantin Vassilyevich! Hi!’ He looked at me. I said ‘Konstantin Vassilyevich, don’t you recognize me? You are my teacher of physics, and I am Lesman …’ – ‘Oh, Boris!’ We embraced …

He was a junior lieutenant. He said ‘Boris, where are you going?’ – ‘To our headquarters.’ – ‘Listen, come with me, to our army. We will be there together.’ – ‘But can it cause any troubles for me?’ – ‘No, you will go to the front line, not to back areas!’ – ‘Where shall we go? To the front

headquarters?' – 'No, it is not necessary! We will go directly to the army headquarters.' And so we arrived there. They asked me 'Do you want to serve in our army?' – 'Yes, I do.' – 'Good. What position did you occupy before you were wounded?' – 'I was a company commander.' – 'Good.' And I found myself in the rifle division no. 302 as a company commander. Thanks to my teacher I became one of them through and through. We liberated half of Ukraine, when Germans managed to defeat our division, and we were taken off from the front line and sent to Voronezh region, to heartland (it happened in July). [Voronezh is a city in the Central Russia, 500 km far from Moscow.] There we got new weapon, new soldiers, because we had lost many people. And I was appointed a battalion commander (about thousand people). And you remember that I was a twenty-years-old senior lieutenant! Two fourty-years-old captains and several senior lieutenants much older than me were subordinate to me. I fought for my country very well.

From Voronezh region we were transferred to Ukraine, where I was wounded badly for the last time: for about seven months I have been treated in hospital in Kuybyshev.

Olga Ponterovskaya, my classmate found me there (if I am not mistaken, she died about 2 years ago). After the end of the war she lived in Kerch. She told me that my beloved Elza Kelzon lived in Nizhni Tagil and she corresponded with her. [Nizhni Tagil is a city in the Urals.] I also got to know that Irina Kompaneets lived in Sverdlovsk. So, I received addresses of my school friends. I wrote letters to all of them, and received an answer from Elza; she also sent me her photograph made in 1944.

Once on the Ukraine front in Antratsit city we held the line during April, May, and June 1943. Germans did not disturb us, neither did we. Peaceful life was around us: Ukraine, summer - amazing time... I was a batallion commander, a senior lieutenant. I do not remember how it happened, but there appeared a photographer, and took a photo of us together with Boulatnikov, a headquarters commander. We were standing in the street, when a very young girl passed by. I said 'Let's have our picture taken!' And she agreed. After that she left and I know nothing about her name or place of residence. She lived in Antratsit, and she was about 17 or 18 years old - that was all I knew about her.

At that time I served in the 51st army, where I managed to get, thanks to my teacher of physics.

About 40 years have passed. In 1983 or 1982 I was invited to Antratsit to participate in some celebration. We were 7 (former soldiers). Hospitality of local citizens was fantastic - we had been among those who liberated their city. They arranged tasty meal for us and invited to the local museum, where showed an exposition devoted to our division and regiment.

And I brought with me that photograph of unknown girl, because I wanted to find her. I showed it to director of the museum. He made copies (at present copy of that photo is an exhibit of that museum) and said 'We will find her.' I left, several months passed. Suddenly I got a letter from a woman named Yavorskaya. She informed me that it was her, the girl we had our photo taken with. By that time she was already a grandmother (having several grandchildren). We corresponded for some time, but it resulted in nothing.

I started thinking where I to go after the hospital. Of course, to the front. Later I decided that it would be better to join Lev. By means of field mail he informed me that he was able to take me to his unit. And it meant serving not at the front line, but somewhere in a financial department. By that time I already was a senior lieutenant. And my uncle arranged a request from the front line, from his unit '… to detach the senior lieutenant Lesman to our unit.' But at that time I got to know by chance that according to Stalin's order, all man-of-war's men had to return to fleet. All of us were in infantry: they threw us to Stalingrad on feet, because the course of war events was extremely hard. I addressed the hospital command, and they answered 'We have no right to send you to the School: we do not know such order of comrade Stalin.' – 'But I have official information that they return seamen!' – 'Certainly we can send you to the front line. Otherwise you have to recall your assignment.' And I wrote my uncle (nervously and urgently) 'Lev, I have an opportunity to get back to the Navy School, please recall your request.'

And they sent a telegram from the front line 'We do not object to sending Lesman to the Navy School.' That was the way I got back to the School and finished the 2nd, the 3rd, the 4th course and became a seaman. So Lev made a good act, a very good act for me: my uncle turned to be very fine to me! We were 5 on the course, who returned from the front according to the Stalin's order; in total 22 cadets from 300 were back at School. I returned to School, which was in evacuation in Baku, at the end of April 1944. On 4th July 1944 the School got back to Leningrad, because the siege had been already raised. Destructions were not great, but people changed a lot, naturally: they starved 900 days during the siege. Leningrad looked not very attractively, but it was already clean: its citizens already introduced order in it.

At that time Dora Isaacovna, my stepmother, the second wife of my father died. When I got to know about it, I was urgently granted leave of absence and went to my father in Chapaevsk. I spent at him one week in February 1945.

Uncle Manila died in Leningrad during the siege. His wife and two daughters were evacuated, they lived very poorly, and they starved. His wife Antonina was Russian, and he had 2 daughters (Irina and Marina), who live now in Leningrad. Irina was born in 1930s, and Marina - 5 years later. My father invited them to Chapaevsk. As for us, we sent our money certificates to our relatives, because at the front they gave us no money. I received a letter from my father 'Boris, aunt Antonina and her girls live in misery, if you can, send them your money certificate please.' I knew already that my uncle was lost during the siege. Sure, I immediately sent them my certificate: they remember it till now. Later, when I left the hospital and had to go to School, I recalled my certificate, but they had been using it for about a year and survived therefore. And certainly later, when I met them in Leningrad, my aunt kissed me from top to toe and said 'If it were not you, we would be lost.' She died at the age of 90. Irina is married to Evgeniy, their daughter's name is Natalya. Marina was married to a person, whose surname was Sadikov. They are divorced; they have a daughter Alena.

After the end of the war I met in Odessa Vera, the elder sister of my Mum and her son (my brother)… And nobody else: actually I do not remember, where from I got to know that my aunt and my grandmother were hanged upon a gibbet. I guess it was aunt Vera, who told me about it. Aunt Vera was evacuated: they left Odessa before it was occupied by Germans.

On the 3rd course I became a lieutenant commander for my long service: I was at war! Being an excellent cadet and a former front-line soldier, I had the right to choose the fleet to serve at. I chose the Black Sea, because I was born there. I arrived in Sevastopol and said ‘I want to serve in Kerch.’ As I was a specialist in hydrography, I was appointed to research hydrographic group. [Sevastopol is a city-port in Crimea.] I arrived in Kerch: earlier I was simply Boris, and by that time I became a four-star lieutenant commander. And I used to meet there all my teachers, including my Molecule [Rosa Kheifets], and she always died from adoration meeting me in the street! Those who remained alive returned from evacuation to Kerch. Besides there also were several schoolmates of mine: some of them returned from the front-line, others survived in occupied Kerch. A lot of us perished during the war at the front.

So it was my native city, I was there one of them through and through. But it was badly destroyed. During the war the city changed hands several times: in 1941 we liberated it, and in 1944 we did it again; that was the reason, why it was totally destroyed. 60 years have elapsed, but it is still in ruins. The factory was utterly ruined, too: all blast furnaces were destroyed. When I visited that place in 1990 or 1991, I found there craft workshops and no factory at all.

After the war

In Kerch I served during one year (in 1947-1948), until they sent me back to Sevastopol and half a year later - abroad, to the Danube River.

Suddenly they called me and told that there came an order from Moscow to send me on Danube, to the Danube Military River Flotilla. ‘Very good!’ I got my documents and left for Izmail. [Izmail is a city on the Danube River near the Romanian border.] After my arrival they said ‘You go adroad for postwar creeping.’ Danube was stuffed with mines: Germans dropped them, Russians dropped, Americans and French did it. It meant that Danube was completely unsuitable for navigation: mines were everywhere. As for me I was an experienced specialist in creeping: I did it on the Black Sea and on the Azov Sea, too. On the Azov Sea I was blown up and thrown overboard, nearly died… And there it was necessary to creep all Danube long: through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria. It was necessary to creep, and I was appointed for that job – I do not know for what sins or battle services. We were in the process of training for about a month, our commander estimated our achievements, taught us the way to behave (you know, in the USSR authorities always taught people how to behave), etc. And we started: from Germany to Bulgaria twenty two times! That means that we shuttled over each area 22 times, because Germans made special magnetic mines, which reacted only to the 22nd pass of a ship: the first ship passed by – nothing happened, the second one passed – nothing happened, and only the 22nd one caused explosion. That means that twenty one ships could pass over that dangerous place safe, and the 22nd one had to be lost. That is why we moved there and back over every area 22 times, and then passed on to the next one – again and again along the whole river. Only after we finished, navigation was opened.

Vienna was damaged greatly. In Budapest all five bridges across the Danube River were destroyed [editor's note: the interviewee is wrong, there were seven bridges across the Danube]; and in 1948 all of them were still in ruins down in the Danube; people used bridges of boats, though 4 years

had passed since Hungary was liberated. Situation in Belgrad was better. In Belgrad they started to develop uninhabited islands in the mouth of Drava River: they arranged communist subbotniks 24 (they were all Communists), where millions of people worked under banners and flags to ‘build the best decoration of the Earth.’ They worked so enthusiastically! They were building new city. At present that place is very beautiful.

I saw Marshal Tito, Rankovich, Kardel, Milutinovich, and doctor Ribar: in fact, I saw all the Yugoslavian history. Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia followed our socialist way of development, except Yugoslavia. However hard Stalin tried to break them down, Tito went capitalist way. Therefore in Pravda Newspaper there appeared an article, signed by the CC [the Communist Party Central Committee] - we all knew that that signature meant Stalin himself, he wrote it personally (we recognized his style). It was titled ‘What is the future of the country leaded by the Anti-Communist Tito’s clique?’ There was a caricature: Tito holding an axe, and blood flows down from it. At that time the 5th congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was held in Belgrad. And I was in Belgrad at that moment. In the streets there were tanks, portraits of Stalin and Tito, and slogans ‘Long live Marshal Tito! Long live comrade Stalin!’ Tito gave a five-hour report, I understood it a little (we learned their language), listening to the report by the radio.

Two weeks later they offered us to leave, to go home. By that time I moved from a flat in Belgrad to our ship (they ordered us to move). And as soon as we finished creeping, they ordered us to go home. So I witnessed to moment, when they separated from us, from the Communist International. And only Khrushchev 25 managed to renew contacts many years later. And other countries were with us. I visited Bratislava several times (the former Czechoslovakia), but I have never been to Prague. I have been to Budapest, Bucharest, Bulgaria, and Austria (in Vienna). I simply went there for a walk, when our ship moored there. And in Yugoslavia I managed to spend about 20 days in a hospital. In Novi Sad city there was a Hospital of Yugoslavian National Army - Hospital no.3. I caught cold, and had 22 furuncules and running temperature. I could not sit, lie down, I ate and slept upright. At first I was treated by our doctors, but it went from bad to worse, and they decided to send me to a hospital. They brought me there and left alone.

I was placed in the officer’s ward: 5 beds (4 Yugoslavs and me). But they loved us: ‘Oh! Here is our friend captain!’ I was a lieutenant commander (a captain). They spoke Russian a little, and I knew Yugoslavian a little, because in 1945, 5 Yugoslav's came to study in our School: 2 captains, a senior lieutenant, a lieutenant and a private. And I was appointed to show them Leningrad, to teach them Russian. We made friends. They were Mario Ostoich, Rade Stiela, and Tonko Zanetich. All of them were given Soviet uniform (they arrived in Yugoslavian uniform). I brought them round the city, taught them Russian. And they studied at our School, finished it and left for Yugoslavia. Therefore when I talked to Yugoslavs in the hospital, I already understood a lot of their words. I spent there about 20 days, and then my guys visited me and told me that they were going to leave for Vienna (Austria). ‘What shall we do with you?’ I answered ‘It’s enough, I am going to leave the hospital!’ The hospital command did not object: I was a Soviet officer, they gave me a certificate of health and I left.

But still I was sick. It lasted 2 months more, but not in a hospital. Therefore they gave me a holiday and I went to Simferopol, to my father’s. People working abroad had 45-day leave, in contrast to others (others had only 30 days). I reached Bucharest by transeuropean train Paris – Bucharest,

and then I moved to Galatz, crossed the Soviet border and arrived in Izmail. [Galatz is the city-port on the Danube River in Romania.] We did not receive salary during a year, we had savings books. Therefore I arrived very hungry: I could not buy food, having no cash. First of all I went to the bank and received 22 thousand roubles. Rye-bread cost 16 copecks, white bread cost 9 copecks, sausage cost 2 roubles and 20 copecks per kilogram. I wore white uniform (it was summer), I was filling my pockets with money and people stared at me… A car waited for me, I ordered the driver to go to a restaurant. There I ordered meals for the driver and for myself. Then we went to buy a train ticket, and the next day morning I arrived in Odessa. I immediately went to the airport and on April 30 I was already in Simferopol in the face of my father. May 1st was my birthday.

At that time I got acquainted with my future wife – it happened in the House of Officers during some celebration. We got married when I returned home from abroad finally. In 1949 in Sevastopol our son was born.

Her name was Serafima Rabinovich, a Jewess. If I am not mistaken, she was born in Belarus (in Mogilev) in 1928, on 31st December. But before the war she lived in Sevastopol with her parents Abram and Raissa. Raissa was a housewife, and I do not remember her father's profession. Her family was not religious, her mother tongue was Russian. When the war burst out, they were evacuated from Sevastopol by a warship to the Caucasus (Tuapse), where she studied at school. Later they moved to Simferopol, where we met each other.

When we got acquainted with her, she worked as a pioneer leader at school. We got married and she did not work for some time. Later she entered the Leningrad College of Soviet Trade and Economy. She became a financier, and works as a financier up to date.

When we finally returned from creeping, our families met us on the frontier. Our commander vice-admiral Kholostyakov also was there on his flagship; we crossed the frontier and moved towards Izmail.

When our detachment disbanded, I was sent to Sevastopol again. Again I arrived to the Black Sea.

Three years had passed since I finished my School, it was necessary to go on studying; I decided to enter the Higher Officers Classes for Hydrography Specialists in Leningrad. I was the best graduate: I became a lieutenant commander and was sent to the Pacific Ocean. As the best student, I had the right to choose fleet. They said 'Sure, you may choose, but we know that you served in the south.' – 'I am ready to serve on the Baltic Sea. Do I have the right to choose fleet?' - 'Yes, you do.' … And they sent me to the Pacific Ocean. Probably, my Jewish origin played its role: it happened in 1951.

I arrived in Sovetskaya Gavan on the Pacific Ocean: conditions there were even harder than in Vladivostok. [Sovetskaya Gavan is a city in the Far East of Russia.] [Vladivostok is a city-port in the Far East of Russia.] A nightmare! I went to headquarters and said 'As I got to the Pacific Ocean, I ask you to give me an opportunity to go further - to Kamchatka.' I already got to know that in Kamchatka one had an opportunity to serve only 3 years, whereas in Sovetskaya Gavan it was possible to spend a hundred years or even more. They told me that in Kamchatka there were no duties of a commander. I said 'Guys, I'll give you a receipt that I do not object to be appointed to any post, but in Kamchatka.' My wife and my child (1 year and a half old) were together with me:

they lived in a barge (there was no other place for living). It was heated by means of a small stove: ice on one side, warmth on the other one. That was the way officers lived at that time. Certainly, they sent me to Kamchatka.

We got to Vladivostok, got on board the steamship, and went to Kamchatka, to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. [Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy is a city in Kamchatka.] My wife cried (she was a girl, 20 years old, having a one year and a half old son). I said ‘Do not worry, we are naval! I am sure that there we will find thousand friends of mine!’ We came there three days before the New Year day, on December 27. I knew that the hydrographic department was situated in the city center. I came there and opened the door ‘Oh, my God! All my guys! Guys, it is necessary to find for us a place for living. It is urgent: we have a little child with us.’ – ‘Sure, come with me to my place!’ said one of them. That was an example of real naval friendship! I brought my family to him and went to my military unit.

Later we moved to my study and lived there for about a week or more. There was a narrow sofa, where my wife and my son slept at night, and I spent nights on the desk. In the morning we went to the restaurant (it was situated across the street, thanks God!), had breakfast and they went for four-hour walk – until 12 o’clock, because I had to work. At 12 o'clock they came back, they warmed themselves, we had lunch, and at 2 o'clock in the afternoon (officers had a 2-hour break) they went for a walk again! At 6 in the afternoon they got back, I made dinner for them using electric stove.

Several days later my son got ill: he got covered with blisters, his temperature was very high - nightmare! I seized him and ran down from the mountain to the regional executive committee of the Communist Party. I pushed aside all the sentinels and ran directly to one of the secretaries. When he saw me, he understood that I was not one to be trifled with ‘What happened?’ – ‘I have no place to live, my child has very high temperature, he is dying!’ He called the manager of the regional Health Department - not less - and told him ‘Take this officer and help him.’ – ‘Let’s go, faster!’ He immediately made a telephone call and said ‘There is a place for your child; they will take him to the hospital.’ Several days passed, and I asked my chief ‘Where shall I bring my child after the hospital?’ – ‘There is no place for living.’ I ran to Headquarters of Kamchatka Fleet.

I went directly to the member of Council of War, a rear admiral. He was the second important man afloat, after the Commander! ‘You see, I have a sick child, I have no place to bring him after the hospital treatment: my family and I live in my study.’ At that time they were in the process of building a two-storied wooden house, not far from the headquarters. The rear admiral made a telephone call ‘Comrade Khryaschev, come to me.’ Major Khryaschev was the chief of the navy housing department. ‘What about our new house? Is it already occupied?’ – ‘Not yet, we will do it tomorrow.’ – ‘Give this officer a room.’ – ‘Yes, sir!’ That was the way I got a room in a two-room apartment. The guys, my friends, nearly killed me: ‘We stay here for 4 or 5 years! We pay 700 roubles per month to rent a room! And you got it during your first month here!’ A blessing in disguise.

It was a block of 8 flats: 4 apartments on each floor. We lived on the second floor: the larger room was occupied by the chief of communication service Vassiliy Pudrikov. We lived in the smaller room. We used firewood to heat premises and had to bring water in buckets. That chief’s wife

Polina called him Vassilyek, and my son used to say ‘Look, Polina, your Kossilyek has come!’ [Kosselyek is a purse in Russian, it is concordant with endearing word his wife chose to call her husband.]

I never came across Anti-Semitism: all my life I was an officer, a naval man - I never felt it. But at present I realize that it was Anti-Semitism that caused my demobilization at the age of 30. In 1953 I was dismissed, regardless of the fact that I was an excellent graduate of the Higher Officers Classes for Hydrography Specialists. I guess it happened because I was a Jew 26. But being in the army, I never felt it. I was a commanding officer, I was a chief, but we did not know words ‘You are Jewish.’ Around me there were Uzbeks, Azerbaijanians, Tadjiks, and Ukrainians. We were at war. After the end of the war I also did not come across something of that kind: they sent me adroad… But there were rumours about people (not my friends), who were dangerously touched… I was far from it, because I am a Russian man of Jewish origin.

I brought up my son not as a Jewish child. Of course he knows that he is a Jew, but it is not of great importance for him: he is a citizen of the Russian Federation. He is not religious at all; he does not know Jewish language and takes part in no Jewish events. He had no difficulties while entering college: he had passed examinations well and became a student of the Leningrad Electrotechnical College (faculty of Automatic Control Systems). As far as the College also prepares specialists for the Army (through the special additional military course for male students), having graduated in 1972, he was sent to the North Fleet. Three years he sailed on board a rocket warship as a chief of computer center, a lieutenant. He visited Cuba and Egypt. After that he became a civilian, he is a civilian now.

I was demobilized and worked in the Ministry of Navy and Inland Water Transport. I was the chief of Kherson Technical department of Azov Transport Shipping Routes. It was in Kherson in 1954-1955.

And since 1955 we have been living in Leningrad: I was transfered to the Leningrad seaport as a chief of the surveying party.

Later I got tired of hanging about seas and I left for military hydrography department, but as a civilian. I started working at the Navy Central Cartographic Department as a chief editor. Later I became a chief of publishing department. I have been working there for 11 years.

After that I left for machine-building factory (the regional Communist Party Committee appointed me). I worked there as a deputy director, responsible for civil defence actions. And until I retired at the age of 60, I worked there. At the age of 60 I was taken ill of hyperthyroid and became a pensioner. It happened in 1984.

After the end of the war I met my schoolmates. We knew addresses. I visited Igor Lekney and his wife Lora Gankina in Moscow. One day I happened to meet Elza Kelzon in Yalta. I was there in sanatorium and she also had rest in Yalta: we ran across at the trunk-call office - nose to nose! It was so joyful! She had already called her mother, but after we met each other she said ‘Wait a minute, I’ll call my Mum once again to tell her that I’ve met you!’ And indeed she called her and said ‘Mum! Listen, today I met Boris Lesman!’

Besides, I and a lot of my classmates corresponded with our director Alexander Tretyakov. Later we, graduates of 1941, started our meetings in Kerch. We did it in alternate years during 20 years. Crazy, I guess! Our director used to say that there were no more schoolchildren of that kind (who went on meeting from year to year, though they were already grandmothers and grandfathers). But not only former schoolchildren came to our meetings, our teachers were also invited: Molecule came (she lived in Kerch), and our director came from Odessa already at the age of 90. Our classmates came from different cities: Sverdlovsk (a couple Nikolay Babich and Irina Kompaneets); Tyumen (Boris Benkler). A lot of us lived in Kerch. To tell the truth, by now I am not sure that they are alive: for the last time I met them in 1991, because later the Soviet Union collapsed.

Eltsin destroyed the great country and the reason was only one: his personal hostility to Gorbachev. But of course, it was impossible to go on living that way. Those years were hungry: shops were empty, people stood in line to buy bread or a piece of sausage – that was the result of our communists' policy. When I was young, I certainly believed in 'the bright communist future', but later I understood that Communist Party members were (first of all) careerists and they gave a damn about people. We are different... We were brought up by Pioneer 27 and Komsomol organizations, by the Communist ideas: necessity to defend our native land, necessity to bear with difficulties for the sake of our native land guided our steps.

Gorbachev 28 understood that the country went in wrong direction, that reforms were necessary. His natural style was reorganizing, but his activities lost its urgency and he disappeared from political arena. But in the beginning of his reforms I welcomed them, because communists led the country into a dead end.

We were the only country in the whole world, which lived according to its own rules. At present we live according to the global rules, but it is difficult: it happened that our people are not initiative, we are accustomed to live under oppression. We need time: Moses took Hebrew slaves to the desert for 40 years to free them, and I guess we need 80 years.

Among the postwar events that one was the impressive. Besides, I remember Gagarin's flight 29. At that time I was sitting in the dental surgery having my cavities filled. Someone entered the surgery and said 'A fellow called Gagarin started the first flight into space, he is flying now!' So I remember Gagarin's flight!

At present my grandson Mikhail lives in Israel, in Haifa. [Haifa is a city-port in Israel.] He is 15; his mother took him there in an underhand way. We searched for him for half a year through Moscow, through embassy, through our acquaintances. It was a tragedy. He does not love Israel, he does not love Hebrew, though he speaks it perfectly (he studies there at school). Now we call each other every month: I call him, my wife calls him, and my son (his father) calls him. We expected him to come to us in summer, but his mother did not allow him. He tells me 'Grandfather, don't worry, at the age of 16 I'll get my passport and start to take decisions myself.'

And notwithstanding the fact that my grandson lives in Israel, I was and I am Russian of Jewish origin: I still know nothing about Jewish holidays and I do not observe traditions. So things came round this way.

To tell the truth, I attend the day time centre in the Hesed Avraham Welfare Center 30: they bring us there; we have breakfast, listen to a lecture or watch a performance. Then we have lunch, and they take us home. But lately I stoped visiting it: I disliked it.

A visiting nurse regularly comes to my place from the Hesed Center: she does my flat, cooks, goes shopping, because, you see, I am almost not able to walk, I live alone (I am divorced).
But every day I have a talk with my ex-wife by telephone: this morning, last night, yesterday morning.

Glossary:

1 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.

2 Nicolas II (1868 -1918): the last Russian emperor from the House of Romanovs (1894-1917). After the 1905 Revolution Nicolas II was forced to set up the State Duma (parliament) and carry out land reform in Russia. In March 1917 during the February Revolution Nicolas abdicated the throne. He was shot by the Bolsheviks in Yekaterinburg along with his family in 1918.

3 GPU: State Political Department, the state security agency of the USSR, that is, its punitive body.

4 Whites (White Army): Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a ‘one and inseparable’ Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

5 White Guards: A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

6 Reds: Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

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

8 Peter the Great (1672-1725): Tsar of Russia from 1689-1725. Peter Europeanized Russia by imposing Western ideas and customs on his subjects. His interests were wide-ranging: among others, he founded the Russian navy, reorganized the army on the Western lines, bound the administration of the church to that of the state and reformed the Russian alphabet. His introduction of Western ways was the basis for the split between upper classes and peasants that was to plague Russian society until the Revolution of 1917.

9 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.

10 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.

11 Odessa: The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were heders in 19 prayer houses.

12 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.

13 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.

14 Chapaev Vassiliy (1887-1919): Soviet military leader, hero of the Civil War of 1918-1920. He was in command of a brigade which played a significant role in the fights. During a battle in the Urals he was wounded and drowned attempting to cross the Ural River. Later he became a popular hero in the Soviet Union.

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

16 Enemy of the people: Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

17 Chkalov, Valery (1904-1938): Russian test pilot, and hero of the Soviet Union. He developed several advanced aerobatic moves. In 1936-37 he conducted continuous, no-land flights between Moscow and Udd island (the Far East) and Moscow – North Pole – Vancouver (US). His plane crashed during a test flight.

18 October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as ‘Day of Accord and Reconciliation’ on November 7.

19 Frunze, Mikhail (1885-1925): Soviet political and military leader.

20 Road of Life: It was a passage across Lake Ladoga in winter during the Blockade of Leningrad. It was due to the Road of Life that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

21 Hero of the Soviet Union: Honorary title established on 16th April 1934 with the Gold Star medal instituted on 1st August 1939, by Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Awarded to both military and civilian personnel for personal or collective deeds of heroism rendered to the USSR or socialist society.

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

23 Political officer: These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The ‘zampolit’, or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery,

and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

24 Subbotnik (Russian for Saturday): The practice of subbotniks, or ‘Communist Saturdays’, was introduced in the USSR in the 1920s. It meant unpaid voluntary work after regular working hours on Saturday.

25 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.

26 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’.

27 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.

28 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-): Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People’s Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party’s control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

29 Gagarin, Yuri Alexeyevich (1934-68): Russian cosmonaut, pilot-cosmonaut of the USSR, colonel, Hero of the Soviet Union. On 12th April 1961 he became the first man flying into space on the Vostok spaceship. He was involved in training of spaceship crews. He perished during a test flight

on a plane. Educational establishments, streets and squares in many towns are named after him. A crater on the back side of the Moon was also named after Gagarin.

30 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.