Sima-Liba Nerubenko

SIMA-LIBA NERUBENKO

Lvov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Orlikova

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Sima Nerubenko and her three grown up children live in a big 3-room apartment (about 80 m2) and cold apartment in the center of Lvov. One can tell that their family was wealthier in the past, but has impoverished. Sima stays in bed for most of the time – she is very weak and her daughter helps her to move in the apartment. Her daughter helped her to get up and get dressed to have her picture taken. Her daughter assisted us with this interview since Sima takes time to restore her memory and rest. Her children are very respectful to their mother's memories.

My family background

I come from a small town of Kamenka on the bank of the Dnestr River in the eastern part of Moldavia. The town was buried in verdure. There were orchards around every house. The population of Kamenka consisted of Jews and Moldavians. Jews constituted the majority of population. However, there was no Jewish neighborhood – we were dispersed in the town. Jewish families were very religious – I would even say fanatically religious. Religion played a major role in everyday life of our family and many other Jewish families – they strictly observed all traditions and rules. There was a synagogue in Kamenka – a big one-storied building with a high circular roof. Women had a space separated with a curtain. All Jewish families came to the synagogue during holidays and on Saturday. Besides, my grandfather prayed in the morning and in the evening. I remember him carefully taking his old book of prayers wrapped in a clean piece of cloth. I don't remember seeing other books in their home. Our grandfather didn't teach his grandchildren since

we didn't live together, but we learned everything about the Jewish way of life from our parents. Jewish families were big – some of them had 13-14 children. Children symbolized pride and wealth in Jewish families. According to religious rules a Jewish woman had as many children as she could bear. The more children a woman had the more respected she was in the community. A childless marriage was sufficient reason for getting a divorce. There were plenty of food products produced in this area: eggs, butter, dairy products and fruit and big families could have sufficient food to make a living. Therefore, it wasn't a problem for families with many children to provide well for them. Jews spoke Yiddish to one another in Kamenka. All Jews were educated: they could read and write and like discussions on various subjects. Moldavians were not educated even though some of them were quite wealthy – owners of big orchards.

Few generations of my father's ancestors were "fruit hunters". They knew how to determine whether an orchard would bear fruit when it was still winter and rented such gardens paying rent fee when there were no leaves on the trees yet. They waited until the fruit grew ripe and sold it – this was how they earned their living. They sold apples, pears, apricots, nuts and wonderful plums.

My grandfather Itzyk Ratzenmar, born in 1860s, was very good at his profession. He could determine the best perspective gardens and gathered unbelievable crops. Even when my grandfather grew so old that he could hardly see anything other men asked him to come with them to determine whether an orchard was going to be perspective. He was a professional and had a good intuition. Like all other Jews in Kamenka my grandfather was very religious. He wore a beard and a cap and looked strong and sun-tanned since he spent much time in orchards. He only spoke Yiddish – I don't know in what language he communicated with Moldavians – I never heard him talking other language than Yiddish.

My grandfather had a small white house near the synagogue. It was too small for his numerous children and grandchildren. When we came to visit him my grandfather welcomed us with a smile and called my grandmother Dvoira. They were almost the same age and they got married at the age of 16-17. To get married at an early age was customary in Jewish families. My grandmother Dvoira was called Diane in the family. Looking at her one could tell that she was very pretty when she was young. She was very nice and kind. Even we, her grandchildren, could tell how dearly our grandmother and grandfather loved one another. They died almost at the same time – in late 1930s. I had left Kamenka before and don't remember the exact date of their death.

My father had three sisters and a brother. His oldest sister Golda, born in 1878, was a housewife and had many children (I don't know how many). Her husband was always praying. He wasn't a khasid and didn't wear payes, but he wore long black jackets. At home he had his kippah on and before going out he put on a hat. I have dim memories of her and her family. I only know that one of her children took her to evacuation and she grew very old when she returned to Kamenka.

When Jewish families came back from evacuation they found all their belongings taken away by Moldavians. Aunt Golda died shortly after she returned home – in 1946.

Aunt Minia (born in 1883) lived in a village near Kamenka. She was a farmwoman. During the great Patriotic War 1 she was in evacuation. She died in 1948. I don't remember anything about her family. My father's brother Gershl, born in 1884, was a laborer in Kamenka. Like my father he finished cheder. He and my father were close friends. I don't think he had a family. My uncle died in

evacuation in Cheliabinsk during the Great Patriotic War. My father's youngest sister Milia born in 1899, died from typhoid or cholera during the war.

My father Srul Ratzenmar, the older son of my grandfather Itzyk, was born in 1880. He finished cheder and then followed in his father's footsteps that was traditional for Jewish families. My father went to work when he turned 11. They often got so many fruit that they didn't manage to sell all of them, in which case the family made jam in huge bowls that were installed on a brick stand in the garden and fire made underneath. My father also sold jam at the markets in Kamenka and nearby towns, but some of it was left for the family. There was so much of it that we really got sick of this jam.

My mother's family also lived in Kamenka. Her father Ershl Reznik was born in 1863. My grandfather cleansed sheepskins and sheep wool sitting in his shabby shed. He looked old and had sore eyes since there was a lot of dust generated by wool. He wore a linen apron when working. I don't know where he got sheepskin or who paid him for work. My grandfather went to the synagogue every day since his house was near the synagogue. My grandfather was very religious. He prayed at home in the morning and in the evening. My grandfather didn't have a house of his own. As far as I can remember his family rented a room and a small kitchen from a Jewish family. I don't know what kind of education my grandfather had. There was only a prayer book at home. My grandfather was a reserved and taciturn man. It probably hurt him to talk since he had cancer of the tongue. My mother took him to Odessa, but nobody could help my grandfather. He died in the early 1920s.

His wife Surah Reznik (born in 1861) moved in with us after he died. She was a tall and slim woman even at her old age. She adored her grandchildren. She always wore white kerchief. My grandmother was constantly doing something in the house, although she had stomach problems. My grandmother strictly followed the kashrut. My grandmother was too old to go to the synagogue when she was living with us, but our family also strictly observed all Jewish traditions and rules and my grandmother could lead a customary way of life that she was used to. She had kosher food, celebrated all holidays and Shabbat with us and lit a candle at Shabbat as the oldest member of the family. It was a tradition in that time. She died in her sleep around 1926.

I only remember Israel of all mother's sisters and brothers. He was born in 1897. Like all other Jewish boys in Kamenka he finished cheder and a Russian secondary school. He was a smart man and a good entrepreneur. He left Kamenka for Leningrad where he became logistics specialist and late – logistics manager at an enterprise. Prior to his departure to Leningrad he married a beautiful girl from Kamenka. Her name was Tsylia and she was the one with best taste in clothing in our family. When she was visiting us there were always bunches of girls around her that came to discuss clothing. They had no children. My uncle Israel Reznik perished during the blockade in Leningrad in 1942. Tsylia survived through the war. After the war she lived in Leningrad. She died in 1962. Israel observed all traditions when living in Kamenka with his parents, but after he moved to Leningrad he changed his way of life. He rarely celebrated Pesach (when he could buy matsah) and Chanukah as a tribute to old traditions.

My mother Dora Ratzenmar, (nee Reznik) was born in 1886. My mother was the nicest and the most beautiful woman in the world. She was a wonderful housewife. She was very inventive at cooking that was not so easy considering the kashrut requirements. She used to buy a chicken at

the market and feed it until it grew to a necessary weight, took it to a shoihet and then the shoihet slaughtered the chicken in accordance with religious requirements and my mother cooked it. We had chicken broth, stew and a wonderfully delicious chicken stuffed neck. I remember jellied chicken wings. My mother was an educated woman by the standards of our town. She could read and write in Yiddish. My grandfather taught her to read and write. He had no money to invite a teacher for her and she couldn't go to study at cheder that was only for boys. My mother had poor Russian. She could hardly speak it. As for reading, she couldn't read in Russian at all. My mother was religious and followed all Jewish rules. My mother always wore a kerchief. She didn't wear a wig since she had beautiful hair. She had a good taste in clothing. I don't remember whether there was a Mikvah. We washed in big bowls at home. On Friday our apartment was shining of cleanliness and my mother lit Saturday candles.

My parents knew each other since childhood – Kamenka was a small town and all people knew each other. My parents dated for few years before they had a Jewish wedding with a huppah under apple trees in the orchard, with a rabbi and kleizmers. The wedding party with many guests lasted for few days. There is all I know about their wedding.

Growing up

We didn't have a house of our own and we couldn't afford to build one – every year we moved from one house to another. In those years when my father had a rich harvest and managed to sell fruit and jam well our family used to rent a small apartment, but when there were no crops we had to stay in poor houses and sometimes we even had to live in just one room. We usually rented houses from people that leased their gardens to us. Our landlords were not necessarily Jews – they might be Moldavians or German colonists 2. Houses in Kamenka were made of brick and whitewashed. This was a special style in Kamenka. Richer houses had wooden floors and poorer houses had clay floors. When my father earned more we rented two rooms and when a year was not very successful we rented one room. We tried to rent smaller areas to pay lower rental amounts. There were no comforts in those houses. Toilets were outside. We washed in big bowls and in winter. Fortunately winters were usually mild in the south of Russia, but sometimes it got cold and there was snow this process took a while – heating water, taking turns, etc. In summer we left some water outside and it got warm on hot days.

My father was a religious man and followed all traditions very strictly. He knew all prayers and knew which section from Torah had to be read on each Shabbat and which on holidays. My father was a very hardworking man, but he took his rest on Sabbath according to the rules. On Sabbath we were not allowed even to strike a match. There was a non-Jewish man that came to do all necessary work on Sabbath. We were a poor family. My father couldn't afford to pay for a seat of his own at the synagogue, but he went to the synagogue on holidays and every Shabbat. When my father came home from synagogue our family got together at the table. My mother lit candles and said a prayer over them, my father said a blessing and we had dinner. We had wine that my father made. On Sabbath our parents took a rest and children played in the garden or went to see our grandparents. Sometimes our neighbors or relatives came to see our parents. They talked and sang Jewish songs sometimes.

We were a close family. We obeyed our father and mother and treated them with respect. We spoke Yiddish at home and celebrated all Jewish holidays. We, children, liked Purim when our

mother made delicious gomentashy pies stuffed with poppy seeds and we played with rattles. At Yom Kippur we all fasted and prayed at the synagogue, even the youngest children. At Chanukah grandmother and grandfather gave us Chanukah money that was quite an event for us. Our grandmothers also treated us to potato pancakes and doughnuts.

Before Pesach we had to remove all breadcrumbs, bread and flour from the rooms. We usually took these leftovers to our non-Jewish landlords. My father watched that all rules were followed. Matsah was baked at the special place and was rather expensive. We bought matsah at that bakery. Our whole family went to synagogue at Pesach. When we came home we sat at the table and our mother gave us clear soup made from a special chicken fed specifically for the occasion. There was a bowl of matsah and eggs pudding in the middle of the table; chicken necks stuffed with matsah and chicken fatand gefilte fish. My father said a prayer and the older son asked him questions as required at Seder.

Our father spoke Yiddish in the family, but he could also explain himself to Moldavians and Russians. My father used to call himself “tsarist or Russian soldier”. We knew that he was a private in the tsarist army. He didn’t participate in any military activities and I don’t remember him telling us stories about his service in the army.

My parents had eight children. Two of them died in infantry. My older brother Oscar was born in 1905. He was a very good brother. He always supported and helped younger children. I remember Oscar preparing to the Bar-mitzva ritual. He learned things and was very excited about the ritual. Everything went well and people greeted him on coming of age. Oscar studied at the town Russian primary school. He also had an old teacher that taught him to read and write in Yiddish and Jewish traditions, but he didn’t teach Hebrew. My brother was very fond of technical things and at 14 he became an apprentice to a craftsman in metals. Later he moved to Odessa and worked at a plant. He finished technical college and married Sophia, a nice Jewish girl. They had a son – Harry, before the war the family moved to Kiev. On the first days of the Great Patriotic war my brother went to the front and perished defending Kiev. Sophia and little Harry evacuated to the Ural. They returned to Kiev after the war. Sophia died in 1970s.Harry lives in Israel now.

My brother Syoma was born in 1910. In 1927 he finished a technical school, served in the Red army went to the front at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War and perished in summer 1941. He was single. He was the most handsome boy in our family and my mother was very proud of him.

My brother Michael, born in 1911, was my parents’ favorite. He finished a silicate college and became a glass specialist. He often visited us even when he lived in Leningrad (working at the glassware factory), far away from home. During the Great Patriotic War he worked at his “Svetlana” plant in Cheliabisk [the biggest in the USSR plant of electric lighting bulbs, located in Leningrad]. I corresponded with him. After he left his parents’ home he didn’t observe any traditions. Michael died in Leningrad in 1989.

My younger brother Fima, born in 1919, followed into his brother’s steps and became a glass specialist, too. He was born and grew up during the period of the Soviet power that struggled against religion. He didn’t have a teacher of Yiddish. Only few Jewish families took the risk of leading a Jewish way of life during the Soviet times. He didn’t have barmitzva since synagogues were closed by the time. He wasn’t religious but he was patient and tolerant about his parents’

religiosity. He was a pioneer and a Komsomol member. He graduated from an Institute in Leningrad. He worked with Michael in evacuation at a military plant in Cheliabinsk. After the war Fima worked at big industrial enterprises. Now he lives in Israel with his family. I can't remember Michael and Fima's families. I am so very old. There are things that I've forgotten, but there are also some details, which I remember, as if they happened just yesterday.

My sister Genia, born in 1912, and I were very close. She finished a Soviet lower secondary school in our town and married Grisha, a Jewish man. He was Komsomol member and atheist. He also came from our town. In the first months of the war Genia's husband perished at the front and Genia and her little daughter Maya were in evacuation somewhere in the Ural. They had a hard time there. After the war when I lived in Lvov my husband told me to let Genia and her daughter live with us until she found a place of her own, because Kamenka was ruined and there was nothing left in it. She stayed with us until she married a Jew from Georgia. Genia observed traditions while living with her parents, but when she married Grisha she stopped observing traditions. Genia was a worker at the pharmaceutical plant. She died in Lvov in 1982. Her daughter Maya worked at a pharmaceutical factory, now she is a pensioner. She comes to see me every now and then. She has a daughter and her husband died of cancer.

I, Sima-Liba Rotzenmar, was born in 1908. I was a very tiny and weak baby and got my double name due to prejudices of that time. The rabbi explained it in the following way: if the Angel of death came for Sima he would see Liba in the cradle and vice versa. It was believed to give me an opportunity to survive.

There was only one school in Kamenka and that was a Russian school. I went there when I turned 8 years old (in 1916). Before I went to school my brother Oscar that was in the third form began to teach me to speak Russian and Russian poems. When I came to school I had no problems with my studies. We studied only most necessary things: writing, reading and counting.

I remember the Civil War of 1916-1918. There was disorder and the power switched from "green kolpak" [caps in Russian] 3 to "red kolpak" 4 several times per day. Military troops came to town, but nobody could understand who they were. They took away food, cattle, clothing and other belongings and fled away. It was quiet for some time until other troops came. This was the period of political uncertainty. People were hiding in the woods or in their cellars. There were different colors of those troops that declared themselves a power, but it was only where we lived they were called "kolpaks'. They took away everything. They robbed even the poorest people. I saw few men breaking into our house. They grabbed whatever there was on the table and left – I guess they also starved. When Denikin troops 5 came all Jews hid at the synagogue and Denikin units didn't dare to kill us there. I also remember a pogrom made by Denikin troops in 1919 but nobody was killed – the pogrom makers only robbed people. I also remember German prisoners-of-war that were taken to some place. They were starved. We threw them pieces of bread and they picked them up from muddy ditches.

The Soviet regime was established in 1918. All people were ordered to get together at the central square where the synagogue was located. Soviet representatives declared the doctrines of the new regime: political stability and equality of all people, that they declared freedom of religious belief. They spoke in Yiddish, Moldavian and Russian. People were very enthusiastic about the Soviet power hoping for a better life. My father didn't care much about political changes. He said that they

had nothing to do with work that he was doing. He continued to work in orchards.

A Soviet Russian and Moldavian school was opened. Teaching was in Moldavian, - studying it wasn't a problem for children – we heard it in the streets and could speak it. Before the revolution boys and girls studied separately and the Soviet power established joint classes where boys and girls studied together. We had new teachers. I was a sociable girl and had many friends. They were mainly Jewish children. We were the poorest and all of my friends came from wealthier families. My close friend was Sima-Mukah. She was commonly called by her 2nd name – Mukah. We played together, shared stories that we knew and had a good time together.

There was no Jewish school in the town, but there were private teachers of Yiddish I attended classes of one of them at his home. He was an old man with a gray beard always wearing a yarmulke. He told a lot about the history of Jews and Jewish literature – he told me about his favorite writer – Sholem Alechem 6. Sometimes I came with a group of children and at other times I was his only pupil. I don't remember the teacher's name and I don't remember the language either.

My parents didn't allow me to become a pioneer. For the most part children of workers and peasants were admitted to pioneer league. Actually my father was a private craftsman and I wasn't pushed to become a pioneer, but since it wasn't obligatory to be a pioneer at that time this had no impact on the attitude of teachers or children on me. My parents believed it was better to stay aside from such public organizations, although my father was very positive about the Soviet power. He was hoping that life of Jews would improve. The majority of officials in the town were Jewish men. This was a very positive sign since during the tsarist regime Jews couldn't even dream of being officials. We all grieved for Lenin when he died in January 1924 – we believed that Lenin liberated people from slavery. He gave land to farmers and industrial enterprises – to workers. But pioneers were taught to be atheists and, therefore, my father thought it wasn't necessary for me to become a pioneer.

All young people are eager to study. My parents supported this urge of ours. My mother used to say "If we couldn't get proper education let our children get it". Kamenka was a small town and the only educational institution there was a lower secondary school, so we couldn't wait to leave Kamenka for a bigger town to continue education. There was a higher secondary school in Peschanka, a small town 27 km from Kamenka. Two of my friends and I went to Peschanka by ourselves and rented a room there. My parents paid my rent. Peschanka was no different from Kamenka with same small houses and a lot of Jewish population. We didn't care whether our landlords were Jewish or not, but usually we had Jewish ones. We always tried to come home on vacations and Jewish holidays when we were off from school, but on a number of Jewish holidays we had to attend school. At home we celebrated Jewish holidays with our parents according to all rules, and when we had to stay our Jewish landlords invited us to join them for a meal with traditional Jewish food. However, we didn't observe Jewish traditions when we were away from home. At that time people didn't care about national issues. We finished school in 1927 and left Peschanka for Rybnitsa, a bigger town in 50 km from Kamenka. There was a rabfak 7 in Rybnitsa. I went to work at a woodwork shop. I became assistant accountant at this company. This was considered to be a manual work position so I officially was a worker. This was important for me since my father was a private craftsman and only children that came from workers' or collective

farmers' families had a right to study at higher educational institutions. Or it was necessary to have a working experience.

Between 1927- 1931 I was preparing to go to an institute. I studied additionally for entrance exams. After a year in 1928 I moved to Kamenets-Podolskiy from Rybnitsa. This was a bigger town in Western Ukraine in about 60 km from Kamenka with institutes, schools and training courses. I finished rabfak and then a preparatory course for applicants to an institute. I was fond of chemistry. I rented rooms from Jewish families where my landlords asked me to teach their daughters, nieces and granddaughters the Russian language. This was how I became a teacher. I didn't quite like this profession. When I had free time I went home to help my parents about the house. My mother grew older and couldn't manage the household. When young people left their parents' houses they spoke only Russian and didn't observe any traditions. This seemed old-fashioned to us, but when we returned home we became Jewish children again returning to our roots. However, we always identified ourselves as Jews, but this didn't matter at that time.

I found out that there was a Technological Institute in Kharkov, a capital of Ukraine at that time in Eastern Ukraine in 900 km from Kaments-Podolskiy. It prepared specialists for glass industry. This was what I dreamed of doing. In 1931 entered this Institute without exams since graduates from rabfak were not required to take exams. I have the happiest memories about my life as a student in Kharkov. We lived in the hostel like a family helping and supporting each other. Nobody cared about somebody else's nationality. We lived in a big and beautiful town and we were young. We took the hardships of life easy. Now I recall that people around were starving and we never had enough food, but when one is young any difficulties seem to be temporary.

I fell in love with Grigoriy Nerubanko, a Ukrainian young man when I was at the Institute. He came from a family of workers in Donbass. He was born in 1911 and he was a serious and positive young man – he had his objectives and knew what he wanted in life. He was a communist. He was successful with his studies and was well-mannered. His mother was a communist and his father died in an accident at the railroad when he was young. Grigoriy's mother raised four children. Grigoriy was an older son in the family and his mother hoped that he would help other children to get education upon graduation from the Institute.

Grigoriy also fell in love with me. My parents were horrified to hear that I was meeting with a non-Jewish man. They said they would never accept him into the family. I graduated from the Institute in 1936 and got a job assignment of production engineer at a glass factory in the vicinity of Leningrad. Grigoriy had another year to study. Grigoriy was a man of his word and wanted to return to his mother upon graduation to help his family, but his mother knew that was seeing a girl and she said to him "Go to Sima – she is your happiness".

In 1937 Grigoriy and I got married in Kharkov. I lived in the hostel, but when we got married we received a room. We were happy. We didn't have a wedding party. We had a civil registration ceremony at a registry office. I wore my fancy cambric dress and Grigoriy had his suit and a tie on. I took my husband's last name and became Sima Nerubenko. I informed my parents and brothers about this important event in my life. My brothers greeted me, but my parents wrote me that they were not going to recognize my husband and me with him. It was hard for me and I tried as hard as I could to come to find their understanding, but they were inexorable. For few years I communicated only with my brothers.

We lived in Leningrad a little less than a year. Grigoriy was getting promotions and was offered a more perspective job at the glass factory of the Krasny May town, Kalininskaya region [Tverskaya at present]. [The “Krasny May factory was one of the oldest glass factories in the USSR. It manufactured fancy and technical glass. It manufactured stars on the Kremlin towers]. We received a nice one-room apartment at the building for non-manual employees of the factory. I worked as production engineer at the factory. We had nice and warm relationships with our co-workers and neighbors. It was the period of 1937-38. Some managers disappeared, but were replaced with younger one, but we were young and happy and believed that everything going on in the country was the only correct way. We didn’t give it much thought, eventually.

In 1938 my son Vladimir was born. I wished so much to take my son to my hometown. I decided to go there in 1939. I didn’t notify anybody and went there in summer when all relatives were there for a summer vacation. Our neighbors saw me walking from the station. They ran to my mother to tell her that her daughter was coming home. Of course, my mother forgot all resentment and came out to meet me. We hugged and kissed. On that summer all children came on a visit and my mother’s brother Israel and his wife came from Leningrad. We spoke Yiddish again and our mother cooked our favorite food. We even enjoyed eating our father’s jam. We were happy to be together and we didn’t realize that it was for the last time. My father wished Grigoriy had come. He said “It’s O’K that he is not a Jew as long as he is good man”. My husband couldn’t come with me. He was in the army and took part in the Finnish campaign 8. I was having the time of my life – my brothers and sisters were together and we lived the life that we were used to – we obeyed our parents, had kosher food and recalled our childhood. The synagogue didn’t function at that time, but my father prayed at home and my mother always lit candles at Shabbat.

This war was short, my husband returned home and we continued to work at the factory. I got pregnant shortly before the war. We were looking forward to having our next baby. We believed there would be no end to peace and happiness.

During the war

On 22 June 1941 9 we heard about the beginning of war on the radio. Grigoriy went Immediately to the military registry office to volunteer to the front, but they refused him since he was a good specialist and the country needed his knowledge to work for the defense industry. They were afraid that Germans might begin a chemical war and the country needed to be ready to it. It was necessary to convert the factory for military production.

I was very concerned about my family especially when newspapers began to publish articles about atrocity of fascists in the countries they occupied. My parents stayed in Kamenka. They didn’t believe that Germans could be so cruel. There were German colonies near Kamenka where my father often rented orchards and there were no problems or conflicts with Germans. And my parents stayed at home. Later people told me that Germans convoyed a march of Jews and my father and mother were there. They told me my father fell and a German soldier shot him. My mother bent over my father and screamed and that German shot her, too. After the war I wrote my brothers Fima and Michael. We decided to go to Kamenka to find out what happened to our parents. People told us how they perished when we came there.

Autumn and beginning of winter 1941 were troubling – the front was getting closer. In January 1942 the factory was evacuated to Gus-Khrustalny [Vladimirskaya region 600 km southeast from Leningrad]. We got a warm and cozy one-room apartment. Gus-Khrustalny was a typical Russian town with wooden houses with carved plat bands and beautiful churches. Jews didn't come to live there during the tsarist regime – there were probably Jewish doctors and convicts. Only after the revolution Jewish families came to the town. They led a common way of life and were no different from other inhabitants of the town. The only difference was in their names, but nobody paid any attention to it. All life in town was focused around a small glass factory that gave a name to the town – Khrustalny [crystal in Russian]. This factory manufactured cups, vases and wine glasses for the tsar's collection. Even during the wartime there was a shop at the factory that manufactured strikingly beautiful crystal vases. Stalin gave them as gifts to high dignitaries that visited Moscow.

In April 1942 my daughter Svetlana was born. Since then I never worked and dedicated myself to my family and raising children. Of course, during the war I was in better conditions than other wives whose husbands were at the front and they had to evacuate from their homes. My husband worked all the time he could. There were weeks when he came home for few hours and returned to the factory. We received food packages and milk for children. However, this was a hard period for the country and people and we also went through lack of food and other hardships of the wartime.

In December 1944 Grigoriy got a job assignment in Lvov. He was offered to be manager of the construction of the factory of glass insulators. He went there immediately. I packed our belongings and children and I followed him. We traveled via Moscow where we had to obtain all necessary travel documents. There was no place for us to stay in the capital and we called on our acquaintances whom we knew in Kharkov. I felt uncomfortable – children were running around making a lot of noise when Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alilueva (she was a friend of the family, but to me she was the daughter of the idol of all people and I felt uncomfortable thinking that we might be a burden to our hosts) came to pick up their daughter and go skating. She was a nice redhead girl of 18 years of age. So I saw Svetlana Alilueva. To thank those people for letting us stay we gave them a very beautiful crystal vase.

Lvov joined the USSR in 1939 under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 10, - it belonged to Poland before. Many Polish families left for Poland and there were many vacant apartments in the town. By our arrival my husband moved into a beautiful mansion in the outskirts of the town. This was dangerous time with many gangs in the woods around – Ukrainian chauvinists struggling against the Soviet power and communists. The locals were polite and called us "Missis." and "Mister", but one could never tell what was on the back of their mind. We had polished manners and spoke fluent Russian – we were different from the locals and we were concerned to live in this distant mansion. We moved to a 3-room apartment with nicely tiled stoves in the center of the town. It is this same apartment where we live now.

After the war

My husband spent a lot of time at work – upon completion of the construction of the plant he became its director and worked there for many years. I was a housewife. In 1947 our third child Victor was born. I understand that we had a better life than many other families at that time. My husband held a high position and had a good salary. I was concerned about articles published in newspapers: about struggle against cosmopolites 11, or the "doctors' case" 12. I had my own small

and comfortable world and life and I tried to keep it out of mind. My husband attended meetings and sittings at the district Party Committee and always came back home late and was very upset. He was a member of the party. He joined the Party during the great Patriotic War when many people were joining the Party. He wasn't a convinced communist, though, but he had to be one to make a career or he would never become director of a plant. My husband had to attend meetings, but this was one and only Party membership related activity that he was involved in. When I asked him what it was about he replied "I'd rather not tell". He was a reserved and taciturn man and always tried to protect me from any troubles.

We didn't have many friends since our family was most important for us. We didn't observe any religious traditions. We celebrated Soviet holidays: 1 May, October Revolution Day, Victory Day and new Year. We also had birthday parties. I made traditional Soviet food: meat salad, jellied meat, cutlets, etc. Sometimes I made Gefilte fish. Grigoriy helped my brothers and sister Genia that lived with us for a few years. He helped Genia with employment and accommodation and supported him. Once I said to him "If it hadn't been for a Jewish wife you would have made a better career" and he caressed my hair and said "Don't be stupid". Our children were always aware of the fact that their mother was Jewish and they never kept it a secret. They chose to be put sown as Ukrainians in their passports – my husband and I understood that it would be easier for them to enter an Institute and get a good job.

Stalin's death in March 1953 was a big grief for our family and for the rest of the country. I remember how our 11-year-old Svetlana closed the door to the toilet and cried there. It wasn't customary in our family to demonstrate emotions and she was ashamed of her tears. My daughter believed he was like a God and didn't believe that Stalin was like any other person in everyday life. This is the result of the propaganda and I didn't think it was bad – we were also devoted to the Soviet power and served it sincerely. I had portrait of Stalin in our apartment. My husband came from work, saw the portrait and smiled. I guess he understood much more than common folks at that time. But even after denunciation of the cult of Stalin at XX Congress of the CPSU 13, when Khrushchev made a speech. Grigory didn't express what he thought of this subject. He was a decent and reserved man. People discussed this speech and I heard things from my neighbors and acquaintances, but my husband didn't even mention the subject to me – Khrushchev's speech was only to be disclosed to the Party officials.

Our children studied in a Russian school. They were pioneers and Komsomol members. They spent summer vacations in pioneer and sport camps. They were sociable and had many friends of different nationalities. There was no national segregation between children.

Vladimir was not doing very well at school and it never occurred to Grigory to involve his influential friends to help our son enter an Institute. Our son finished a technical college. Svetlana was very successful with her studies and entered the faculty of physics and mathematic of the Lvov University. Upon graduation she got a job assignment in a distant village. In a year and a half she became a postgraduate in Kharkov University, but due to her family she couldn't finish her studies. She got married and in 1967 her son Sergey was born. Svetlana's husband wasn't Jewish. Her marriage failed and we prefer to not discuss this subject. In a short time she divorced and returned home to Lvov. This was a failure of a marriage and we are doing our best to forget about it. Svetlana worked at school and then got a job at a research institute where she worked for many

years. I was raising my grandson Sergey.

In 1972 my husband Grigoriy Nerubenko died. My husband was buried at Lychakovskoye cemetery in Lvov at the place where Party officials were buried. I stayed in this apartment with my children. I wish my children had more luck in their personal life. Vladimir was married, but his marriage failed in a short time. He doesn't have any children. He worked at a plant for many years, but now this plant is closed like many other enterprises. He is a training instructors teaching teenagers to work with industrial units. He spends a lot of time at work and gives it much effort. Svetlana is a pensioner and gives private lessons in physics or mathematic. Victor graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute and worked at a scientific research institute. He is jobless now. He is single. My only grandchild Sergey has a higher education. He had no work here and few years ago he moved to Israel. He lives and works there. We look forward to hearing from him, listen to the radio and read newspapers to know more about this country. As for moving there – no, my children are too indecisive. I would like to visit this country, but to travel at the age of 95 – who ever heard about it? We had never discussed this issue in our family before. We had a good life – so why change anything? Those that wanted more from life left for Israel.

Few years ago my Jewish neighbor took me to Hesed. I liked it there and all of a sudden I felt myself at home like I did many years before in Kamenka. I recalled what I thought to be forgotten. My daughter Svetlana also liked it in Hesed. She became a volunteer and enjoys taking part in various programs. I haven't left home for about half a year, though. If it were not for assistance of food and medications provided by Hesed life would be too hard. I have wonderful children. They are with me and I am not alone.

GLOSSARY:

1. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.
2. Ancestors of German peasants that were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.
3. Ataman called Zeleniy, (green in Russian), head of a gang involved in robberies and banditism.
4. Red - warriors Red (Soviet) Army. All these gangs brought much misery to civilians in Russia.
5. White Guards counter-revolutionary gang led by general Denikin. They were famous for their brigandage and their anti-Semitic actions all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.
6. SHOLEM ALEicHEM (real name – Shalom Nohumovich Rabinovich) (1859-1916), Jewish writer. He lived in Russia and moved to the USA in 1914. He wrote in about the life of Jews in Russia in Yiddish, Hebrew & Russian.
7. Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.

1. SOVIET-FINNISH WAR 1939-40, the Soviet Union began the war on 30 November 1939 to take hold of the Karelian Isthmus. The red Army was stopped at the "Mannengeim line". The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its members. In February-March 1940 the red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. On 12.3.1940 the Peace Treaty was signed in Moscow. According to this treaty the Karelian Isthmus and some other

areas now belonged to the Soviet Union.

2. On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.
3. non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which fall into history under name Molotov-Ribbentrop pactum. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government in 1939 began secret negotiations for a nonaggression pact with Germany. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German pact of friendship and nonaggression. This pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.
4. Anti-Semitic campaign initiated by J. Stalin against intellectuals: teachers, doctors and scientists.
5. «Doctors' Case» - The so-called Doctors' Case was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with the murder of outstanding Bolsheviks. The "Case" was started in 1952, but was never finished because Stalin died in 1953.
6. 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what was happening in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.