

Sholom Rondin Biography

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Shlomo and Feiga Rondins live in a new neighborhood in Lvov. Their apartment is clean and the walls and ceilings are painted in the “al fresco” technique that is so much liked by the master of the house. There are curtains on the doors and macramé pictures on the walls. Macramé is a new hobby of Shlomo. Feiga is a wonderful housewife. She looks younger than eighty. One can tell that she has lived a wealthy life. Shlome is not happy with the current situation in the country and blames the government of Ukraine in all problems.

My father Sholom-Girsh Rondin had perished two months before I was born. My father was born in Gomel in 1900. At present Gomel is a regional town in Byelorussia, but in the end of XIX – beginning of XX centuries it was a provincial town within restricted residential area (1). There was Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish population in the town. Jews constituted over half of the population of the town – there were over 5000 Jewish families.

Jews didn't live in their own neighborhood in the town. They mixed up with other nationalities. Having neighbors of other nationalities people were bound to learn to be patient and tolerant. Jews were mostly involved in trade and handicrafts. Gomel is surrounded by the woods and its population lived in wooden houses. The family of my grandfather Mendel Rondin resided in a one-storied house in the center of Gomel.

My grandfather Mendel was born to a family of shoemakers in late 1860s. My grandfather inherited the family business. He worked at home and later acquired a shop near the market. My grandfather only fixed and repaired shoes. My grandfather was a quiet, nice and kind man. Shoemaker was the least prestigious profession of all other professions that Jews had. Shoemakers were thought to be drunkards and uneducated men. My grandfather was different. He was very religious. He didn't work on Saturday. He went to the synagogue that was not far from our house. He took me with him when I was small. I carried his book of prayers and thales and saw him praying.

My grandfather prayed at home every morning and evening. My grandfather only read books of prayers. We had the Bible translation into Yiddish and the Talmud. I don't know where he studied, but I believe he must have finished cheder and maybe Yeshiva too. Their family spoke only Yiddish. My grandfather spoke Russian with his customers with an expressed Jewish accent.

My grandmother Khashe Rondin was the head of the family. She was also born in Gomel in 1875. My grandmother was a wonderful housewife and mother. She took good care of her household. She always wore a kerchief. My grandmother cooked on the stove. She baked bread in the oven for a week. My grandmother kept her utensils for dairy and meat products at various cupboards and the

rest of the family had to follow this rule strictly. Everything had to be kosher. My grandmother had no education – she couldn't read or write, but she could count well and she always went shopping to the market.

My grandparents were renting the house. I remember their Russian landlord that came to pick up the rental pay once in two or three months. He talked with my grandmother very respectfully. There was a big kitchen garden near the house where my grandmother grew corns, cucumbers, tomatoes, potatoes, peas and beans. They also kept a cow in the cowshed in the yard. My grandmother milked it on all days but Saturday. On Saturday her Russian neighbor came to milk the cow. When my grandmother was ill my grandfather milked it and later they taught me to do it. They were not a wealthy family, but they led a decent life. Even at the hardest time they didn't make an impression of a poor family.

They celebrated all Jewish holidays in accordance with traditions. On Friday the house was shining of cleanliness. My grandmother lit candles in silver candle stands. She put a hala baked on a previous day on a silver dish covering it with a snow-white napkin. They went to the synagogue to say the prayers that were required on each holidays. They also made traditional food. At Chanukah they made "latkes" – potato pancakes and at Purim – Gomentashen – little pies with poppy seeds. At Pesach all dishes were cooked from matsah. There were few synagogues in Gomel. Matsah was made at the bakery every year and we bought matsah rather than making it. My grandmother had special dishes and tablecloths for Pesach. After they returned from the synagogue they all sat at the table and my grandfather conducted the first seder and the family got down to a festive dinner.

My father had two brothers. Motl, born in 1902, also became a shoemaker. He finished cheder. He wasn't very educated, but he was a good shoemaker and a very nice man. He worked at home, provided for his family and supported us. If it hadn't been for him we wouldn't have survived at trying times. When my grandfather grew old and couldn't go on working Motl went to work in his shop near the market. When he bought two loaves of bread at the market he left one for us on his way home, and when he had one loaf of bread he left a half for us. Motl had a wife and two children. His son's name was Sholom and his daughter's name was Sarah. My uncle Motl went to the army in 1941. He perished during the Great patriotic War. I don't know what happened to his family, since we only communicated with them before the war.

My father's younger brother Neeh (Naum) was born in 1910. He finished a Jewish school and then finished a rabfak (2). In the late 1920-early 1930s industrial enterprises were constructed in Gomel. Neeh became an equipment mechanic at a big shoe factory. During the Great patriotic War he was evacuated to Kazakhstan with the factory. During the Great patriotic War this factory made officer boots for the front. After the war he returned to Gomel and in 1950s he and his wife moved to Simferopol. From there they moved to Israel. Neeh and his wife died in 1970s.

My father Shlomo Rondin, born in 1900, was my grandmother's older son. He was very religious even as child. He was constantly praying. He finished a yeshyva and knew Talmud and other religious books. He was an older son and had to go to work to help his parents to raise younger children. Perhaps that was why he didn't become a rabbi. My father was also very talented in making clothes. He was an apprentice and very soon became a professional tailor. My father fell in

love with a Jewish girl when he was very young. His darling was a Jewish girl Rachel Levenchuk. She was the same age as he.

My mother's father Kalman Levenchuk, born in 1865, was also a shoemaker. My mother's family lived in the outskirts of the town and their customers were mainly villagers and poor families from the outskirts of the town. My mother's family was poor. I visited them several times. I remember a big stove and reeky walls. It even seems to me now that there was only one big kitchen and no rooms in their house. My grandfather worked on a stool beside the stove wearing a black apron and a cap. My grandfather made a break for lunch. At that time the house became very quiet. My grandfather washed his hands and prayed. Then he sat at the table and my grandmother poured a ceramic bowl of soup for him. He ate the second course that was usually potatoes with goose fat from this same bowl. I found it different from how they ate at my father parents' home. They always laid a white tablecloth on the table and put beautiful plates for the first and second courses and always ate a second course with a knife and a fork. My grandfather spoke Yiddish. I don't know what language he spoke to his customers – I didn't have a chance to hear.

My grandfather was a taciturn man while my grandmother was a chatterbox. She was 5 or 6 years younger than my grandfather (she must have been born in 1870). I don't know her name – I just can't remember anybody calling her by her name. Her grandchildren -children of my mother's sisters and brother called her "babele" – grandmother in Yiddish. Now I realize that my grandmother got married when she was very young. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a huppah and the rabbi conducted the wedding ceremony. Their children also had traditional weddings. Their family was deeply religious. They observed all traditions and, celebrated all Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut. On Saturday and on holidays they went to the synagogue and my grandfather prayed three times a day before meals.

Their older son Girsh (Grisha) was born in 1886. He was tall, fat and spoke in a rough voice. Grisha was a shoemaker, but he worked somewhere else in the town. He had a bunch of noisy children. My mother had two older sisters: Gita and Perla, born in 1890 and 1895 accordingly. They were both married and had children. Gita and her family lived with my grandparents. I don't remember what their husbands did for a living. They all (except for my grandfather Kalman that died in 1937) failed to evacuate from Gomel during the Great Patriotic War and perished during occupation.

My mother was born in 1900. She studied at the primary school for Jewish children. She studied in Russian. They didn't study any Jewish traditions or Yiddish or Hebrew. Such schools were in various areas of the Russian Empire for children from poor Jewish families. Children studied to read and write in Russian and mathematic. My mother learned Yiddish and Jewish traditions from her mother and her mother learned them from previous generations. My mother got married when she was very young. My parents got married at the end of 1919. My parents had a beautiful Jewish wedding. There was a rabbi at their wedding paying honors to the handsome and intelligent bridegroom. My grandmother on my father's side liked her daughter-in-law and the newly weds settled down in my father's family. Their marriage took place during the Civil War when the Red army came to Gomel.

They incurred big losses and needed to recruit local men. They came to my grandparents' home and told my father to get ready to go to the army. He was 20, his wife was pregnant, he never held any weapon before, but he couldn't disobey, since they might have shot him as a deserter. Shortly

afterward my father perished in the town of Bragin (near Gomel) when he was 20. His comrade brought his belongings home at the beginning of 1920. Later my grandmother went to visit the common grave where he was buried. When my mother became a widow at 20 she stayed with her husband's parents. I was born at the hospital in Gomel on 13 April 1920. In a week's time my grandmother Khashe Rondina came to the hospital to take my mother and me home. On the next day in 8 days after I was born - the rabbi came to conduct the ritual of circumcision. It was at the time of the Soviet regime and the rabbi's certificate was not valid and my mother obtained my official birth certificate at the registry office. I was named Shlomo after my deceased father.

Shortly after I was born my mother began to work as a teacher at the Jewish children's home. After the Civil War in 1918 there were many orphaned Jewish children and my mother was invited to take this job, as she had some education that was rare at that period of time. She taught the children in Yiddish. My mother wanted to take me to the children's home, but my grandmother didn't allow her to do this. My mother lived with my grandmother for about 3 years until she got married and moved to her husband. I saw her almost every day. She lived nearby and often brought me new clothes and gifts.

Her 2nd husband was a Jew, a shoemaker. I don't remember his name. He was a very sickly man and he died. My mother had two daughters from that man that died in infancy. I lived with my grandmother and I was very small, so I only have dim memories of this period. My mother and grandmother had very good relationships. My mother took me to her new home several times, but in the evening I demanded that she took me back to my home. And she took me to my grandmother's home. We communicated very little with my mother's parents. It's hard to explain why we weren't close with them. They had a big family and besides, they lived at some distance from us. We visited them rarely and they came to see us very rarely. I wasn't quite attached to them, although they were glad to see me and gave me small gifts, but I didn't feel like visiting them at all. My home was with my grandfather and grandmother Rondins. They loved me and I loved them.

In 1928 or 1929 my mother remarried again. Her third husband was a painter. His name was Misha Karminskiy. He was a Jewish man. My mother lived with him for a long time. He was a good man. He treated me well when I came to visit them. In 1930 my sister Milia was born. At the beginning of 1940 my mother had another daughter - Dusia. My mother quit her job at the children's home that housed children of different nationalities at that period of time and became a housewife. Her husband continued working as a painter. Gomel was a bigger town. There were 4 Jewish schools in it. When I turned 7 in 1927 my family asked me «Do you want to go to a Russian, Belorussian or Jewish school?» I decided to go to the Jewish school. We spoke Yiddish at home and I decided it was natural for me to go to the Jewish school. I communicated with various children. Most of them were Jewish, but some were Russian. I had no problems and got along well with all of them.

The school I went to was very good. The teachers were wonderful. We studied mathematics in Yiddish, reading and writing in Yiddish and Russian. All subjects were taught in Yiddish, but the program of studies was similar to any other school and we were raised like any other Soviet children. There were about 30 children in our class. I remember Rasha Kapran, a young teacher of the history of the Jewish people. I also remember our teacher of drawing; I was very good at drawing. I learned the history of the Jewish people - I read in Yiddish how difficult their life was and

how hard and trying times they had. I got free lunches at school. They were good kosher meals. I was a quiet boy and didn't take an active part in public life.

I remember how I became a pioneer. Our senior schoolmates tied red neckties in the concert hall at school and we took a vow to be active fighters for communism, but I took little interest in this process. I received 16 rubles per month for my deceased father. My grandmother went to the town where my father was buried in a common grave and obtained a certificate from local authorities that my father perished for the idea of workers and peasants. 16 rubles was not so much money. Life was good in the Soviet Union. There were pioneer camps where children could spend their vacations free of charge. One of the camps was in about 12 km from Gomel. There were children from various schools. We got ordinary meals (non-kosher), but I liked it there a lot. We had an interesting life. Our day began with physical exercise; we took part in sport contests and concerts in the evening. Sometimes we ran away to the woods in the evening to demonstrate our courage. I remember how scared I was in the woods when every stir scared to death, but we pretended we were not afraid. We learned patriotic songs and poems, mainly about Stalin. We loved him devotedly. He was the leader of the Soviet Union.

At school I tried to be a good pioneer. We collected waste paper and scrap, cleaned up the area around school, competed in our successes at school and dedicated it all to the building of communism and our chief – comrade Stalin in person. Meanwhile I went to the synagogue with my grandfather. I don't remember that pioneers were not allowed to go to synagogue. There were many Jews in the town and there was no tension associated with the issues of nationality. People spoke Yiddish in the streets with no feeling awkward. My grandmother and grandfather observed all Jewish traditions: they lit candles on Shabbat, celebrated all holidays and followed the kashrut. They only had kosher food. Of course, I didn't believe that God existed. I thought their faith was a vestige of the ignorant past, but I respected their age and traditions.

1933 famine (3) was the same for us as for all other people. We sold our cow, because we had nothing to feed it with, we sold our silver dishes, but we still didn't have enough to eat. My father's brother Motl supported us and shared what he earned with us. My sister Milia lived with our mother and my stepfather near our house. I often saw her, but we weren't close. She was small and I had older friends. My mother was very nice with me, but she couldn't spend much time with me. I was growing up. They also starved in 1932-33 and couldn't help us.

I quit school in 1933 to go to work to help my grandparents. I finished the sixth form. I was 13 at the time when I began to work with my stepfather. My mother convinced him to take me in his crew. He was a painter. Construction was in progress in Gomel at the time and there were 4 or 5-story buildings constructed. I was an assistant at first. My stepfather paid me well for my work. I worked with him in Gomel for about half a year. Then he gave me an assignment at the Moscovskiy railway station in Briansk. We traveled to work there. I received 8 rubles per day plus accommodation and meals. It was a great salary for the time. We had meals at a canteen for workers. It was not kosher food, but it was well prepared and fresh. I worked with my stepfather in this way for 3 years. I became a professional painter.

I turned 16 and understood that I had to go ahead when I met a man that changed my life. His last name was Rozin. He was a very nice and decent man. He had a wife and a daughter. He was a Jew,

but he was not religious. He was a painter and worked in “al fresco” (Editor’s note: water color painting on damp plaster). He made paintings on the walls and ceilings. He was the best professional in Gomel. I went to work with him. It was interesting work. My stepfather felt hurt, but I talked with him openly and he understood me. I needed to do more than I could working with my stepfather. In 1936 I worked in the crew of Rozin. We made paintings in restaurants, cultural centers and movie theaters. We had much work in Gomel and got assignments in other towns.

Many industrial enterprises were built in Gomel: machine building plant, Kirov plant that manufactured agricultural equipment. Every enterprise built cultural centers, canteens and recreation centers and we got new and new scopes of work to do. There were almost all Jews in our crew; there were only two Russian men. We worked on Saturday, too, and in the evening we went out.

My future wife Faina (Feiga by her passport), nee Korol, was born in 1921. She was my schoolmate. We had common friends. We enjoyed going to dance in the park in the evening. We went dancing at weekends, as on weekdays I was too tired to go. I also liked cinema and theater. We went to the Jewish theater in Gomel. I don’t quite remember what we saw, but it must have been Jewish classic. Most of my friends were Jewish and we spoke and understood Yiddish. I was planning to marry a Jewish woman. We got married in 1938. Regretfully, my grandmother Khashe Rondina didn’t live to see me married. She died of a heart disease in 1937. When we got married I was 19 and she was 17 years old. She was under age and her parents gave their written consent to our marriage. They had no objections, as I had a stable profession and could provide for the family. We had a civil ceremony and then a wedding dinner party arranged by my wife’s parents. My mother and her husband also came to the party. We could have had a religious wedding, but my wife and I were raised atheists by the Soviet power.

I moved to my wife’s family. They lived in a house located not far from my grandparents’ house. I refurbished the room that they gave us. My wife’s father Usyel Korol was a tailor. Her mother was a housewife. My wife’s parents were religious people, but their children grew up as atheists. Their parents followed the kashrut until the end of their life. They prayed every day and often went to the synagogue. His brothers and sisters were also tailors and seamstresses. They lived in Briansk and Novozybkov (a district town in Briansk region). Faina’s older sister Anna (born in 1919) graduated from the Medical Institute in Smolensk, was at the front during the Great Patriotic War, worked as obstetrician in Gomel for many years. She lives in Israel now.

My wife’s family was good to me. My mother and her husband also liked my wife. My mother called her “My daughter”. We spoke Yiddish in the family. Faina worked as a cashier in the grocery shop, after finishing school. Later I became leader of a crew at work. Our former leader’s name was Yasha. His two sons also worked in our crew. He was a Jew. I came to his crew when they were working in a restaurant. Yasha had some problems related to politics – I don’t know any details, as I took no interest in political matters. I liked the situation in the Soviet Union. I liked it that poor people had an opportunity to get free education and a job. Everybody got a chance to have a decent life. Residential restrictions for Jews were cancelled. All members of the Soviet society had equal rights. I liked how industries developed and how many factories and plants were built. Yasha didn’t come back to the crew. I don’t know what happened to him. We asked no questions at the time.

At the end of 1939 my wife gave me a son. We named him Gennadiy – it was a popular name at that time. In 1940 I was recruited to the army. They ignored that I was a breadwinner in my family and that my wife had a baby. It was possible to pull some strings to avoid going to the army, but I am not the type of person to get involved into such dealing and wheeling. A law is a law.

I was sent to the field-engineering unit in the town of Murmansk in 3500 km from Gomel. There were fortifications built on the bank of the bay in the vicinity of Poliarniy town. Our unit stayed in Murmansk to unload trains. I know what a polar night is, I saw the Northern lights and discovered the beauty and grandeur of the North. I was lucky to stay in the town. I also worked at the Red army cultural center painting decorations for the stage. I had an opportunity to watch performances. People treated us with respect. My fellow comrades called me Shlyoma and in my documents my name was written as Shlomo. I never changed my name while many other Jews changed their Jewish names to Russian ones. They pretended they did it to make communication easier, but in reality they did it to hide their Jewish nationality. Our commanding officer was a Jew and many soldiers were Jews and there was no anti-Semitism whatsoever. I never heard a bad word in my address. My service term was to last 1 year and 8 months instead of standard two years due to hardships of the North and I was looking forward to demobilization. We didn't even think about the war.

On 22 June 1941 (4) I was a sentry on guard of a gasoline tank. My shift was 2 to 6 am. Around 4 o'clock in the morning (the sun rises early there and I saw it all) I saw planes flying low in 3 rows. I was enjoying the sight when they began dropping bombs and I understood what it was about. Our service lasted 6 years instead of 1 year and 8 months.

My family was in Gomel and I was very worried about them. Although my grandfather told me that during the Civil war Germans were good customers and were polite. My wife and son evacuated with my wife's parents. My wife notified the rest of the family that they were in Mamlyutka village in the Northern Caucasus. My wife's father also had all equipment of his garment shop evacuated. They opened the shop in Mamlyutka and my wife went to work there. They made uniforms for the army. My mother and her daughters Milia and Dusia also were in evacuation, but I don't remember where. Her husband was on the front and she worked at a collective farm. I contacted my mother via my wife and I don't know any details. We corresponded and valued every message and every day of our life. I didn't have any information about my grandfather Mendel Rondin for a longtime. After the war I was told that he evacuated during the war, but his train was bombed down. I don't know where he was buried or whether he was buried at all. All I know is that my grandfather Mendel Rondin perished in 1941.

The war at the Kola Peninsula was cruel. We were holding defense of Murmansk. We were fighting side by side and paid no attention to nationality issues. We had to stand for one another or we wouldn't have survived. I was awarded a medal "For Courage", the first one in our battalion. We were to destroy tanks of the enemy. We crawled across battlefield under fire from both sides. Many combat engineers perished on those days. There were many Jews among mine layers, because the commandment knew that Jews were smart and cautious. During the war when Stalin was at the head of the state everything was well organized. Soldiers were well fed in the North. They had to have sufficient food, or they would have frozen to death. Once we were encircled and our planes

dropped bags of dried bread and other food for us. We knew that we had to take every effort to win the victory. I was a willful soldier, but I didn't take part in any political activities. I didn't become a party member, either. Nobody forced people to join the Party. It was a choice of an individual. As for me, all I was interested in was my family and my work.

I followed the events on other fronts and was very happy to hear that Gomel was liberated. We celebrated 9 May 1945 with loud "Hurrah" exclamations and shooting from flare pistols - every combat engineer had a flare pistol. But our service was not over yet. There were minefields left. I removed 837 mines from a specific area. Many miners perished after the war. My friend perished when two tank mines exploded. We carried those mines storing them at a spot, when these two mines exploded. The paradox of the situation was that these mines were rendered harmless. We stored them to blast at the end of the day. These mines exploded under the weight of a tank of 350 kg; even if a soldier stood on a mine he would have been safe. Somewhere on a side of a mine there was a secret fuse and my friend must have pressed it to his body. We gathered parts of his body to put them together to bury. At every field we left 3, 4 or five comrades buried.

I missed my wife, my son and work. Letters were delivered to us by a night train. My wife and child were in evacuation until 1946. They notified me when they returned to Gomel. I submitted an application for a leave and in summer 1946 I left home. My commanders offered me to continue my career in the army and promised promotion, but I couldn't care less about promotions. I wanted to reunite with my family and dreamed of holding my brushes at work. After demobilization I went to Gomel. My son was 6 years old. When I was leaving he was just a baby and when I came back home he was about to go to school. Of course, the boy didn't recognize me when I arrived, but it took him no time to get used to me. My wife told him about me.

It's interesting that I spoke only Russian for 6 years in the army, but when I met with my wife I began talking Yiddish with her. Our son also spoke Yiddish. He stayed with his grandmother - my wife's mother Golda Korol, and she spoke only Yiddish.

Gomel was significantly destroyed during the Great patriotic War. I didn't have work to do in Gomel - my profession is to do the finishing of a construction structure - and it didn't even occur to me to do other work than al fresco. I did my first job in Rovno. I went alone and my wife stayed in Gomel. I lived in a men's hostel in Rovno that was not a good place for a family. Besides, my son had to go to school. Rovno is a regional town in the west of Ukraine, in 800 km from Gomel. Our crew - I knew its members before the war, they also demobilized from the army - was invited to do the finishing painting of the railway station in Rovno. We enjoyed doing our work. We painted the railway station and the restaurant at the railway station. It was beautiful. Acceptance commission that came to accept our work said that they needed us to work in Lvov. I told them that I had a family and needed a place to live. This was in 1947 when my wife was expecting our second baby.

I went to Lvov. I liked the town and found many job opportunities there. However, we didn't get any place to live. Those people lied to us and we quit working for them. We worked in restaurants. I found a vacant apartment that belonged to a Polish family. There were many vacant apartments in the town. I obtained a residential permit for us to reside in this apartment and we moved in there. It was an old apartment in an old house, but there were two rooms and tiled stoves in it. I

refurbished this apartment and went to Gomel to move my family to Lvov. My wife already had our second baby (1947). We named him Matvey, but called him Marek in the family.

We've lived in Lvov since 1948. My wife didn't have to go to work. I provided well for the family. We gradually made friends. Most of them were my co-workers. We had Jewish, Ukrainian and Polish friends. We celebrated Soviet holidays, went to parades, sang Soviet songs and got together at birthdays. We didn't observe any traditions or celebrate holidays. We didn't even know the dates of Jewish holidays. The Soviet power didn't allow to publish Jewish calendars. We didn't go to synagogue. We were not interested ourselves and didn't want to involve our children in those outdated and unnecessary rituals. Now people say that there was a period of anti-Semitism (late 1940s - early 1950s), but I didn't feel anything like that. I was a worker that did his work honestly and people treated me well. Perhaps when some upstarts wanted to become big bosses failed they blamed anti-Semitism for their own failures, but I never faced any problems in this regard. I've always been a patriot of my country. I still think that the Soviet Union was the fairest state in the world. Stalin's death (March 1953) was a tragedy for me. I understood that there was going to be no order in the country. Stalin was the leader capable of holding the huge state in his fist. I don't believe those tales about his "crimes".

Our crew was a team. We got along well. There were 6 of us in the crew. Half of members of the crew were Jewish. I felt like continuing my education. I studied at an evening school after work. Such evening schools allowed people to complete their secondary education while working. I was 30 when I went to school again. It was difficult for me to study, but my fellow students were the same kind: they returned from the front and wished to complete their secondary education. After I received my school certificate I was appointed as leader of the crew. Our crew was like a family. We did a good job painting public buildings, restaurants, cultural centers, cinema theaters and houses. We were paid well for our work. Good job is worth paying good money for it. I worked hard, but I provided well for my family. My wife had no reasons to complain. She and our children always had everything they needed. So, there were two pupils in our family: Gennadiy went to the first form of primary school and I went to the eighth form of the higher secondary school.

My wife and children spent summer vacations with her parents in Gomel. Her father continued to work as a tailor, only he worked at home. My wife's parents lived a traditional Jewish life celebrating holidays and attending the only synagogue in Gomel that survived in the war. They bought matsah at Pesach and sent some to us in Lvov. They couldn't follow the kashrut, as there was no kosher food, but they observed Jewish traditions whenever they could. When my older son Gennadiy turned 13 my father-in-law insisted that we invited a rabbi home to conduct the ritual of Bar mitzvah. I had no objections - I always treated older people with respect. As for my son, I don't think he was impressed at all. Only few families had this ritual conducted for their children and my son believed it to be a vestige of the past that he had to go through.

My mother and her daughters also lived in Gomel. Her husband returned from the war an invalid. He died in 1954. My mother worked as a cleaning woman and I tried to support her family. I sent them money and bought clothes for the girls. Her older daughter Milia finished school and worked at a printing house and her younger daughter Dusia that was the same age as my son studied at the Trade College. My mother and I were very close until she died in 1975. She spent the last years of her life in the family of her younger daughter. She was very ill and died of cancer. She was

buried at the Jewish corner of a cemetery in Gomel.

Our sons were good boys. They were successful at school. My wife was raising them, as I spent a lot of time at work. I don't remember any discussions in our family related to the issues of nationality. Our children studied in a Russian secondary school where there was a number of Jewish teachers and schoolchildren. They spent their summer vacations with my wife's parents in Gomel. My mother also loved them dearly. They enjoyed going to pioneer camps.

When my son finished school it was a problem to enter an institute in Lvov. There was competition and besides, there was corruption one needed to have friends or relatives to enter a higher educational institution. I told my sons that I didn't have any ties to pull strings for him and he went to Gomel in 1958. He stayed with his grandmother and grandfather. My son entered the Construction Institute in Gomel and stayed there upon graduation. My younger son Matvey also went to Gomel after finishing school in 1965. He graduated from the Machine Building Institute.

My sons were not raised Jewish, but they always identified themselves as Jews. My older son knew Yiddish since he was a child. However, they married Russian girls. I wished they had married Jewish girls. It's hard to explain why I wanted it. Perhaps, deep inside I wished they didn't have any misunderstanding and anti-Semitism in their families. But they grew up internationalists and cared not about nationality. They get along well with their wives and this is all that matters to me. My older son was Construction manager. Now he is a pensioner. He might have stayed at work longer if the Soviet Union had stayed, but now nobody needs his experience, - he was manager of a big construction site. He has a country house and grows vegetables in his kitchen garden. My older son has two sons: Boris (born in 1969) and Edward (born in 1972). My younger son has one son - Eugeny (born in 1970). Our grandchildren are engineers. They married Russian girls. Only my wife and I are a Jewish family. We remember Yiddish and the way our grandparents lived. We don't remember any traditions and don't observe them and our grandchildren have three quarters of non-Jewish blood in them. That's the way life is.

After the downfall of the Soviet Union each Soviet republic became an independent state and our children and grandchildren happened to live abroad in Belarus and we live in Ukraine. We didn't see each other often before - we worked and were busy. But now with the boundaries, customs, and tickets - it is too much for us with our miserable pension and they can't afford visiting us either. They come to see us once a year. They used to send our grandchildren to spend their vacations with us, but now they have their own things to do. They call us every now and then.

My stepsisters on my mother's side came to say "good bye" to us prior to their departure back in 1991. They live in Israel and they are very happy. Six years ago my wife and I went to visit them in Israel. We liked it there. It's a beautiful country. We undoubtedly would like to live there, but we don't have much time left. We should have moved there 10 years before. Our relatives have a good life there. They receive a good pension and their children are well settled. Yes, we should have gone there. I would have been better there. Here I lost all my saving to the money reform. I saved my whole life for our old age and for our grandchildren. I had sufficient savings to lead a good life here, but we lost them all during the downfall of the USSR. When my sisters were leaving they took their savings with them and we here were robbed, but there is nobody to complain to.

Jewish organizations invite us to various events, lectures. We watch movies and listen to music at Hesed. Hesed provides us with medications and food packages. It is a big support – we wouldn't manage without their help.

I am a pensioner now. I worked as a painter 44 years. I did my work well. Now nobody needs my skills. People wallpaper their apartments. Nobody wants to learn my profession. They will come to it – only it will be too late. Life was better during the Soviet power. I believed in this power and liked it. The Soviet power wouldn't have allowed impoverishment of old people – veterans. I worked hard day and night. I didn't join the party – I didn't care about it, especially that they had meetings of all kinds and other activities. I am not a public person. But I was respectable and didn't face any anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. I don't see any anti-Semitism now. I believe if one is a decent person nobody would dare to hurt one's dignity.

1. In the Tsarist Russia the Jewish population was allowed to live at certain areas. In Kiev Jews were allowed to live in Podol, the lower and poorer part of the city.
2. Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.
3. In 1920 an artificial famine was introduced in Ukraine that caused the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress the protesting peasants that did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful forced famine in 1930-1934 in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the farmers. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that did not want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.
4. 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.