

Liza Usherenko Biography

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I was born at Podol, Kiev, on 7 April 1922. My name is Liza Usherenko.

My father told me a story about the origin of our name, and he said that according to the legend one of our ancestors was Usher. He was involved in cattle driving and he started the Usherenko line of our family some time in XVII century. Our ancestors' previous family name was Tverskiye.

My father's grandfather was a cantonist. He served 25 years in the tsarist army. Cantonists were usually forced to be christened, but my great grandfather didn't accept Christianity. From the end of XVIII century Chernobyl was known for the famous tsadik dynasty of Tverskiye. In 1830s they became the most influential in Ukraine. My father was living in Chernobyl during the period of tsadik Shlomo Bencion Tverskoy. Shlomo had a house, a synagogue and a "court" and led a typical life for a tsadik: praying, studying the Torah, Talmud and other religious books. Therefore, Chernobyl had strong foundations for the traditional Jewish life. The majority of population was Jewish, but there were also Ukrainians in the town. The main trades were commerce, handicrafts, cattle breeding and farming. Jews and Ukrainians were good neighbors.

My father's father Shymon Usherenko was born in Chernobyl in the 1840s. I don't know what he was doing for a living, but he could provide well for his family. His wife Fruma was a housewife. According to my father, my grandfather was a religious man. He died from a disease in 1883 and my grandmother Fruma Usherenko was left to raise their six children. Their first son Sholom was born with defective shoulder joint and my father took the responsibility of the oldest son in the family. My grandmother Fruma was a hard working and courageous woman. She began to make bagels. She was a bagelbakeren (bagel baker in Yiddish). This was her way of providing for the children. They had one pair of shoes and took turns to go to the cheder. They didn't eat bagels, of course. All of them were working to give education to Sholom, the oldest one, to spare him from hard physical labor in the future. According to my father, my grandmother Fruma was keeping Jewish traditions whatever hard time they were going through. She lit Saturday candles, went to the synagogue with the boys and tried to celebrate Pesach, Rosh-Hashanah and Hanukkah.

My father's older brother was born in 1870. He studied to become an accountant. In their family it was almost like being an academician. I saw him wearing a bowler when he became a refined intellectual. He was lucky to marry Zlata Stoyanovskaya that came from a wealthy family. Zlata was also a Jew – mixed marriages were not appreciated at that time. They had two children: daughter Adel and son Misha. Later all of them moved to Moscow and we didn't hear from them any more.

My father, Moisey Usherenko was the second son in the family. He was born in the town of Chernobyl in the vicinity of Kiev in 1874. After him came two twins: Avrum and Perets. They were born in 1877. Perets became a shop-keeper. He got married and they lived a house in Perlovka

near Moscow. They had two daughters and a son. I don't remember their names. Avrum stayed in Chernobyl and perished during the Holocaust. My father's sister Surka was born in Chernobyl in the end of 1882. She got married and had six children: Syoma, Freidl, Riva, Mania, Yasha and Lyova. Her husband was killed during a pogrom. This must have happened in Chernobyl at some time around 1920. She became a widow, like my grandmother Fruma, and moved to Kiev soon. Aunt Surka provided for her family by cooking for big celebrations. She was a hardworking and smart woman and had a terrific sense of humor. Later her older children went to Moscow and her younger son Lyova stayed with her. He became a mechanic and got married. He had two children: Misha and Mania. All of them went to the Babiy Yar. My father also had a younger brother Berl. He was born in Chernobyl in 1888. In the early 1900s he moved to Kiev and became a mechanic. He married Malka and they had three sons: Haskel, Sima and Boruch. All of them went to the Babiy Yar, all were taken away by the war.

My father left his parents' home when he was 9 years old to become an apprentice in Kiev. He was working at the fish storage facilities. He didn't study, but he was learning from his skilled tutors. Before WWI my father served in the tsarist army. He was recruited from Kiev along with other young men at the age of 17. He wasn't recruited during the war, because he had 3 children to provide for. My father had three children in his first marriage, but only two survived. My father didn't get any profession. He worked as a laborer his whole life. He didn't have an opportunity to study. He always had to work to provide for himself and his family. Yakov and Sonia are my paternal brother and sister. His first wife, a Jew, was a very poor but pretty seamstress in Kiev. He was very much in love with her and wasn't looking for a marriage of convenience like his brothers. He married this girl, but she died when giving birth to her third child. My father had to raise Yakov and little Sonia. He had to work very hard to buy milk for his little one. Later he got married. His wife couldn't have children of her own and he married her to have her look after his children. She died from spotted fever during the revolution of 1917. Sonia was about ten and Yasha was 15-16 at that time.

My mother's name was Dvoira Usherenko, nee Grinberg. She was born in Gornostai-Polie near Chernobyl in 1886. There was a dynasty of the Tverskiye tsadiks in this town, too. The majority of population in this town was Jewish. Gornostai-Polie was famous for its strong Jewish traditions and so was Chernobyl. Her father Morduch Grinberg was a melamed. He was teaching younger children. They were also very poor. My grandfather Morduch also made boot trees for shoemakers. By the way, my grandmother Leya Grinberg was Fruma's sister (my parents are cousins, therefore). Leya had a kitchen garden and grew vegetables for her children and grandchildren. My grandfather Morduch was very strict and authoritative and his only business was to teach children. He studied religious texts, prayed and read the Torah. There were five children in the family: the older sister Nehama was born in the 1870s. She was very beautiful, but she died when giving birth to her 3rd child. Mikhel was few years younger. He studied well and became a teacher in Kiev. In 1878 Hai-Ginesia was born. When her husband was killed during a pogrom in Chernobyl in the 1920s she was left with two children. The next child after Hai-Ginesia was Haim. He was very handy: he could fix shoes or a fence. Later he left for Kiev and was a typesetter in a printing house. My mother was the youngest in the family. All of the children in their family got education. Brothers Mikhel and Haim went to the cheder and Nehama, Hai-Ginesia and my mother were studying at home. They must have been taught by their father or brothers. They followed religious traditions in their family.

My mother remembered her father wearing a beard. Mikhel and Haim had a Barmitsva when they reached 13 years of age. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays in the family. My parents took the boys to the synagogue on Saturday and on holidays. The girls were staying at home. My mother was very good at embroidery. She could also make a nice dress from old clothes. Hai-Ginesia told me that my mother was patient and persistent.

We had a fable in the family. My cousin Semyon Grinberg, a journalist, told me about it. Grandfather Morduch's father or grandfather was a very big and strong man. He got up in the morning straightening his shoulders and said "Well, Malhavomes (angel of death in Yiddish) won't get me now and that's that!" But then at the end of a tiring day when he became sleepy he was saying "Well, Malhavomes, you can come now. I'm yours".

My mother's sister Nehama was a striking beauty. She died at childbirth in 1902. Her husband Chervits was a very wealthy man. He was a dealer, buying and selling things. He insisted that he wanted to marry the younger daughter (my mother) in the family. My mother married her older sister's widower when she was 16. She didn't want to marry him. Besides being twice as old as she was he had children: Lyova, Yasha and little Nina. My mother was forced to marry him. Her sister Hai-Ginesia said to her "Don't you love you're your nephews and your niece? Don't you love Lyovochka, Yasha and Nina? Would they be happy with a stranger of a stepmother? They will be unhappy children. You can bear to marry him. He loves you and will take good care of you and he is so rich". And my mother, a 16-year-old girl, replied "All right, I will marry him and will live with him until I am 25, but then I will leave him. And don't you judge me then". My mother left him when Nina was 10 years old. My mother was pregnant then.

She was a woman of strong will. She didn't love him. She must have gone to her relatives in Gornostai-Polie. Her husband was very hurt and found another woman. She had children of her own, he had children and they had common children later – it was like a kindergarten in the house. My mother's little daughter Adel also stayed in his family. My mother knew that his new wife was a kind woman and that Adel would be all right there. My mother left for Kiev. She was hired as a wet-nurse in a rich family. She was saving to buy a sewing machine and learned to sew. When she received a residential permit in Kiev she went to Gornostai-Polie to take her daughter Adel to Kiev. She had to kidnap the girl, because nobody wanted to give her back to my mother, and Adel came to live in Kiev when she was 2 or 3 years old. It was in 1913 or 1914. My mother lived alone for ten years until she met my father. Both of them came from big families and not all relatives were acquainted with each other. Besides, my father was 12 years older than my mother and had left for Kiev before she was even born. His sister Surka was my mother's friend and she must have introduced her cousin to my mother. My father was an extremely handsome and honest man. They fell in love with each other and got married. I mean, they didn't have a Jewish wedding – both of them were poor, but they began to live together. I was born in 1922 when my mother was 36 and my father was 48 years old.

When I was born my father was working at the fish storage facility of Falkovich. Falkovich owned a two-storied house in 42, Verhniy Val street at Podol. My parents lived in the deep basement of the house. Their landlord's family lived on the first floor, and there was also another family renting few rooms. My father worked as a clerk, loader and cooper for them. He also went with his master to purchase fish in Astrakhan and Revel. He was a great fish expert. He couldn't write, but he could

calculate well. My father told me that he was enthusiastic about the revolution of 1917 at first, but in due time he became more reserved about it. My father was always exploited – before and after the revolution. He was the most honest and decent man, but he was no good at making money. He used to say “I work my fingers to the bones, but is it my fault that they pay me only 30 rubles?” My parents loved each other, but they did have arguments, because of their financial situation.

When I was one year old Falkovich (my father’s employer) allowed my parents to move into an outhouse in the yard. There was one bigger and two very small rooms. One of them was my parents’ bedroom. There were two beds and my pram in it. My stepsisters Sonia and Adel lived in another small room until they got married. Yakov had left for Moscow by then.

There was an old wardrobe and a carved cupboard in the big room. My Mummy finally got a little kitchen of her own and she was washing and cleaning every bit of it. My father took a very good care of this house. He made everything with his own hands, as they never had any money to buy things. We were actually starving and Papa never got enough food. He was tall and handsome and could do and make just anything. He fixed this clock with his hands of a laborer with fish bone splinters in them. It’s a very beautiful XVII– XVIII century table clock that was the only beautiful thing in our house.

My older brother Yakov left the family almost when I was born. He finished the trade school named after Brodsky (sugar manufacturer) in Kiev and left for Moscow. He got a job of a baker at the Filippov bakery. He also wrote articles about achievements of this bakery to a newspaper and was sent to study at the Institute of Journalism in Moscow. Upon graduation from the Institute he got a job for “Pravda” newspaper, the central newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee. He was soon promoted to a member of editorial board. He didn’t support us financially, but he subscribed Pravda for my parents and a children’s magazine and “Pionerskaya Pravda” for me. When this important brother from Pravda came to Kiev he stayed in Astoria, one of the best hotels, and he had a car at his disposal. This was the first time when I got a ride in a car. There were cars in Kiev before the war, but not in Podol. The first truck quite an event in Podol.

Of course, my older sisters and my parents were spoiling me. They couldn’t spoil me with toys or money, but they were doing their best in other things. For example, somebody had a gorgeous doll. My parents went to buy a doll’s head at the Kontraktova Square (a big square in Podol. There was the biggest market in Kiev at weekends with vendors and customers from all over Ukraine. One could buy almost everything at this market). Then my father made the doll’s body and my mother made a lovely dress and I had the best doll in the yard. Her name was Ninel – I remember this well. I also remember another story from my childhood. Before Christmas vendors were selling white houses and one could place a candle inside such house. They cost 10 kopecks, but my father never bought what he could make himself. My father made a house with a garden for me! There was an electric bulb and my mother made a shade for it. There also was furniture in this house and I could put my dolls inside. I used to take this house to the yard and all other children were admiring it – it was the best house ever!

I went to the kindergarten as soon as one was open in Borisoglebskaya street near the Dnipro River. Each child had to bring food from home. I had a small bag and my mother put some food in it. There were all kinds of children. It didn’t matter then whether one was or wasn’t a Jew. My sister Sonia studied five years in a Russian school. She was a sickly girl and finished with her studies to

help our mother around the house and with sewing. Adel finished Russian secondary school #19 in Podol. My sisters had Russian and Jewish friends. My parents spoke Yiddish with one another, thinking that Adel and I didn't understand much of it. But we understood and could speak a little in Yiddish, although our mother tongue was Russian. My parents didn't quite follow any Jewish traditions. We didn't lit candles at Sabbath. My father went to the sauna in Podol each Friday (a Russian tradition). However, my mother's sister Hai-Ginesia was lighting candles until her last day. My mother probably believed that God would forgive. My parents followed all covenants of the God. They were always faithful to one another, never stole or took possession of anything. They probably had a good intention to observe the Sabbath, but my father had to go to work on Saturday and my mother had to cook and give him some food. We always had matsa at Pesach, but we hardly had any celebrations at Jewish holidays, as we were so poor. Our family seldom went to the synagogue. I was once or twice at the synagogue in Nizhniy Val street when I was a child. I was inside and watched the service but I wasn't impressed. The Jewish community was changing at that time. Young people attended clubs. I remember Sonia and Adel went to one of such clubs in Krasnaya Square to listen to revolutionary poets and concerts.

My father took me out sleighing in Verhniy Val. There was a runoff ditch in this area stinking awfully. Zhytniy market spread almost to the Dnieper River and boats with goods were near the bank. People were buying directly from boats – it was cheaper.

At five I fell ill with scarlet fever and diphtheria. I was taken to hospital and had ear inflammation. The doctors had to make trepanation of the skull. I returned home when I was six years old. 8 years was the age to go to school, but I wanted to study earlier. I learned to read and write when I was 2 years old. Somebody gave me an ABC book for my second birthday, but someone else told my parents that I was too young to learn the ABC. I heard this and decided that I would do it anyway. At three I signed my photograph and at four I was writing letters to my mother when she was in hospital. And my mother visited all schools on her way from the market begging the primary school teachers to admit me to the first form, even if such admittance were a sheer formality. One teacher at the Jewish school agreed and I went to my first school in Konstantinovskaya street, Podol. My first schoolteacher's name was haverka (comrade in Yiddish) Tania. My mother made me a checkered dress and a ribbon and I looked very nice wearing them. We studied Yiddish and children's poems of Andrei Kvitko, a Jewish poet. We studied all subjects in Yiddish. The first class was usually arithmetic and I was sleepy at this time of the day. So I missed arithmetic. When it was time to go to the canteen for lunch the children were going in pairs and I was always stopped with the question "And who is this?" I wasn't in their official lists so why give me food? My teacher always had to whisper that I didn't know that I went to school unofficially.

At 8 they had to admit me to school officially. My mother said that I had nothing to do in the first form and I was to go to the 2nd form in Ukrainian school #20 or Russian #19. My parents didn't want me to study at the Jewish school. They realized that it would be easier for me in the future if I went to a Russian or Ukrainian school. They chose the Ukrainian school. My father was very happy that I was going to the best Ukrainian school and besides, it was two blocks closer to our home than the Russian school. This was in 1930 and boys and girls studied together. There were workshops, a gymnasium and a concert hall at school. Children performed on the stage and I sang in the choir. I had a friend Nyusechka Tais, a Jew. She lives in the USA with her children now. I had another friend Zhenia Ostrovskaya, half-Jewish. Her father was a doctor. There were many Jewish children in my

class. I studied in this school six years and then we went to the newly built school in Mezhygorskaya Street. I finished my 10th form in this school. Many of my classmates perished during the war.

Adel married Goihman in 1937. He was her co-student at the factory trade school. He was one year younger, but he was head over heels in love with her. They didn't have a Jewish wedding. Her husband's Jewish name was Srul, but everybody called him Sania. They moved to Dubno before the war. They had a son Sima. Sania was director of the officers' club in Dubno. When the war began Sania received a vehicle to evacuate his employees, women and children. The officers did understand that he had no chance to survive as a Jew. He moved people to a safe location and returned to perish fighting beside the officers and other military. His old mother went to the Babi Yar.

Sania gave me skates and I went skating. I was 8-9 years old. I went to the skating-rink at the Dynamo stadium. My mother always waited until I came back home. Once I didn't come back until very late. A boy pushed me and took away my skates and boots. I had never seen my mother with such a happy expression. I was hurt then – I was so upset and my mother was feeling happy about it. She was concerned for me but she couldn't keep me from going skating.

In the 1930s we got a primus stove and the cooking process became much easier for my mother. I remember my mother cooking corns on this stove – my mother bought it at the lowest price at the market. I also loved the first green apples that Mama bought. If she ever bought meat, it was only the most inexpensive that she could find. Liver was the cheapest meat. We also ate rabbit meat. Rabbit meat is a taboo for Jews. My father worked as shop assistant and he bought these rabbits at the store. It was meat for us improving our diet a lot. Once Mama made rabbit stew and Adel's husband Sania ate a leg. Mama asked him how he liked the rabbit and he jumped out of the table. He had strong Jewish convictions. But we were so poor that eating rabbit meat was a way out for us. My father also ate pig fat, especially in winter when there was nothing else to eat.

I remember the books that we had at home. My father had a taste for beautiful things. He bought a Bible in the red binding illustrated by Dorei (19th century French artist). This edition was in Hebrew, with Hebrew and old German print. I grew up with this Bible, because I often fell ill due to poor nutrition and lack of vitamins, and when I did, I always had the Bible on my knees. My father borrowed Sholom Alehem from the library. My father used to read to the whole family. He was reading in Yiddish and the others were bursting into laughter.

When I was five I started borrowing books from the children's library, located on the 5th floor of the fire tower. I was a fast reader and read all children's books in no time. I read about Magellan, Jul Verne, etc.

We had mainly Jewish families living in the house, but there were Russian families, too. There was the Falkovich family and another young family with children in the house. Janitor Karev and his family lived on the first floor – they were a Russian family. Karev was a member of the party and a very advanced communist. There was also the family of Goldovskiye in the basement. Goldovsky was a vendor and they always had enough for a living. The Goldovskiye had only one daughter – Zinochka. She always had lovely dresses and her grandmother was always following her to give her some food. The family of Pilavskiye – Moier and Brushka, their son Aron and daughter Lusia (my classmate, although she was one year older) – was living on the ground floor above the basement.

Pilavskiye went to sell small things in Glebovka near Dymer. They evacuated during the war and survived, but their son went to the front and perished. There was also the Vinnikov family. The father took part in the Japanese war of 1905. Their older son was a very sickly child. He didn't live long. They had two daughters and a son left. Another family was of an elderly couple: Nuhem and his wife. They had no children. Nuhem was a stove maker in the past. Another neighbor was Asia Polial, a seamstress. The Shpilmans lived in the basement from the side of the street. Shpilman was a shoemaker – he purchased leather and made beautiful shoes during the NEP period. His older daughter Tania was my friend and they had another daughter Havka. The Ashkenazi family lived on the upper floor. They were very religious Jews and wore thales. The father and the son earned their living by making baskets.

There were great celebrations on holidays in our yard. We couldn't afford to celebrate Jewish holidays, but better off families had beautiful celebrations with traditional treats and music that we could attend. At Hanukkah adults gave change to the children. I saw many weddings with huppah in our yard. The bride and bridegroom were under the huppah. The bride had a white cover on her. I also remember them breaking something "for luck". And then a party began with lots of food and gefolte fish (stuffed fish in Yiddish). Our neighbors also went to the synagogue. There was a synagogue in Nizhniy Val and two synagogues in Yaroslavskaya street: one for richer and one for poorer people. But after the revolution going to the synagogue wasn't appreciated by the new authorities.

In summer I went to the town camp in Trukhanov island (across the Dnieper). We went to the bank of the Dnieper in the morning and crossed the river on a boat. The children spent a day in the camp, swimming, playing and eating, and went home in the evening. I was sensitive to sunshine - I often fainted. I fainted near the boat or on the stadium where they had all kinds of pioneer gatherings. We were brought up to be Soviet patriots. We made pioneer fires and sang songs. We had little food and a lot of ideological nonsense.

In 1930 my sister Sonia married a Russian man. My parents didn't have any objections to their marriage. Lyonia was a nice young man and they liked him. Her husband Lyonia Elizarov was a sailor of the Dnieper fleet. During the famine of 1932 Lyonia received rationed food at work and he brought everything home. It was food for our whole family. Later Lyonia became an officer and was sent to Blagoveschensk in the Far East. Sonia and little Tolia followed him soon. My father couldn't provide for the family and we were almost starving. My mother asked my father to go to their older son Yakov in Moscow. She wanted to save him from starving to death. He didn't want to go there alone, but my mother convinced him by saying that he would be sending parcels from there. He agreed and went to Moscow. He got a job at the automobile plant. I don't know how big his salary was, but he was living in his son's family, and his daughter-in-law had a very bad temper. He was a very tactful man and couldn't send us anything. But once we received a parcel from Moscow. My mother and I ran to the post office and my mother put this parcel on my knees. We opened it and saw bread, all molded. We ate this bread dipping it in the water. I have horrific memories of the dead in the streets and green flies all over them. It was a nightmare. I remember our neighbor boiling potato peels and us breathing in the smell of it. We had soy bean flour and I didn't eat soy. My mother made soy flat cookies and went to the market to sell them and buy a piece of bread. She came back in tears with few copper coins. She didn't get any bread and she didn't have any flat cookies left. She gave them away to hungry people. And then Mama got a job at a sewing

workshop. She was sitting at the conveyor a whole day. She got some mess of a soup at that workshop, she ate the a little bit of it and brought me the rest. We survived the famine and later my father returned home. He didn't bring any money. He was receiving very little money for his hard daily work at the automobile plant that was hardly enough to buy food. He also saved something to buy a ticket home. But we were happy that he was back and that he survived. If he had stayed in Kiev we would have starved to death. My mother earned a little by sewing and we could manage more or less. Some time before the war my mother was invited as a consultant to a dressmaking shop. Besides consulting my mother did a lot of sewing for them, although she had no compensation for this extra work. Papa worked as a shop assistant at a grocery store and returned home very tired. But still, he made a bench at the gate and always grew flowers in the yard. He always enjoyed doing something for the community.

In 1940 I finished school and entered philological department in Kiev State University. My father wasn't very happy with my decision. He was 64 and wanted me to go to work as soon as possible. But my mother was very happy. She wanted me to get good education and was ready to sew day and night if necessary. Although the competition was high I managed to pass my entrance exams. I didn't face any anti-Semitism before the war. There were few Jewish girls with Russian names: Petrakovskaya, Okun and I, Usherenko and few with Jewish names: Fogel, Vareلمان. But at that time nobody took any notice of the nationality.

By that time my sister Sonia and her family lived in Moscow. She wanted her husband Lyonia Elizarov to make a career. He submitted his documents to Leningrad Military Political Academy named after Tolmachev and they moved to Leningrad. Later Lyonia was transferred to the Military Political Academy named after Lenin in Moscow. The war began before he finished the Academy. In summer 1941 University students were sent to make trenches near Kiev. We stayed there day and night. We received water, sausage and bread for work. This was the first time in my life when I had enough sausage. We were in Zhuliany near the airport. The airport was already bombed by Germans. We were told to go back to Kiev. I walked as far as Podol and met my father in Nizhniy Val street with a bandage on his head. He was on duty at the Arsenal plant and was injured during bombing. He was beyond recruitment age and volunteered to work at the plant. When the evacuation process began Mama sent me to look for Adel and her baby that had evacuated taking no luggage and having no money. I went as far as Marxshat on the Volga and decided to stop looking for Adel. I wanted to get my parents to where I was. Our neighbors Karevs that evacuated to the same place where I was told me that they were trying to convince my parents to escape. My mother said "no" and my father joined her, although he wished to evacuate. All of them perished in the Babi Yar: my parents, my father's sister Surka, my father's younger brother Berl and his family. Berl and his wife Malka had two sons: Hatskel and Boruch. My mother probably thought that she had to stay where their relatives were staying. She wrote me "Don't worry about us, we have lived our life". She was fifty five and my father was sixty seven.

I realized that they had gone as soon as I read that Germans were killing Jews in the Soviet newspapers. I received a letter from Adel and went to Novouzensk to join her. I worked writing for newspapers there. My sister Sonia, her son Tolia and her little daughter Tania were in the evacuation in Sterlitamak (Bashkiria). Lyonia Elizarov and my brother Yakov were at the front. I also wrote requests to recruit me, but I was shortsighted and they refused me. Later I went to the labor front in Orsk and from there I was called to University that was in evacuation in Kzyl-Orda. In

1942 I began my studies at the Kiev University that was in evacuation in Kzyl-Orda, philological faculty, however hungry and poor I was. Other students had parents supporting them, but I had nobody. We only had radish mess soup for a meal.

I fell ill with epidemic jaundice. I was in hospital, but I had nothing to eat at all. I was supposed to receive 4 kg of vegetables, but they only had radishes. I left my hospital and walked until I got to the morgue! And I thought "That's where I should be". I was walking holding to the walls of the buildings until I reached our hostel. One of the students was working at the shop where they released bread in exchange for cards. She did me a favor and gave some bread in advance and promised to bring me crumbs. I lived in this way until 1944, when it was time for reevacuation. I was traveling on a freight train. There were few railcars with cotton cake that we were eating. Those that ate more of it died. I survived, because I was eating it in little bits. When we reached the Aral Sea we took some salt with us. I took just a small bag and went to sell some at the next stop. It was still close to the sea and nobody wanted to buy salt. One old woman felt sorry for me and gave me a boiled egg for a little bit of salt. Just one egg. Then there was cotton cake for a 5 day trip to Penza. In Penza one could get a piece of bread for salt. Everybody ran outside, but I couldn't get up from weakness. Someone took a little bit of my salt and brought me a slice of bread for it. That was all I had in Penza – this slice of bread that I was eating slowly to last longer.

When I got to Kiev I found out that another family was living in our apartment. I settled down at the hostel of Kiev University on Vladimirskaia Hill. This was May 1944 – the time of devastation. Young people worked in Kreschatik cleaning it up and removing the debris. I was starving until I got a job of a secretary in Aeroflot where I could eat at the canteen for employees. I lived in the hostel. We could get some potatoes in exchange for salt, but we were still hungry and that's how we lived. I went to work as proofreader in a newspaper. We also donated blood. We received some money, a meal and some rationed food for blood: a little bit of butter, sugar and egg powder. I remember making some egg-flip with a spoon of butter, sugar and egg powder. It was a fatal blow for my liver and I could hardly come back to my senses afterward.

I worked a lot, but I spent little time studying and I was expelled from University. I rented a room in R. Luxembourg Street. I had to heat the room with wood, but I couldn't get any and had to live in the cold unheated room. I walked to my work in Zhuliany. My galoshes were torn and I tied them to my socks with a strap. I came back from work into a cold room and went to sleep on a cold sofa. I don't know how I survived. My colleagues found out how I lived and addressed our management requesting them to take me to the army. One could get regular meals, clothes (military uniforms, new and warm) and a warm place to live in the army. The army was the only place in the country, destroyed by the war, where an individual could have such provisions. Dedovets, commanding officer of night bombers military unit 105 that was within the Aeroflot structure, agreed to have me in his unit. It was located in Panevezys (Lithuania).

Our unit finished the war in Königsberg. In the middle of 1945 they began to disband this military unit and I was transferred to the "Soviet hawk" newspaper. I worked as a radio operator in this newspaper receiving the Informbureau messages. Later they disbanded this organization, too.

My brother Yakov returned from the front and began to work for "Pravda" newspaper. I wanted to stay in Moscow at first, but I couldn't get a residential permit. Adel also returned from the evacuation and wrote me to come to Kiev. We rented a room in Reitarskaya Street, Kiev with the

three of us – Adel, her son Sima and I - living in it. Adel's husband Sania perished in Western Ukraine at the beginning of the war. Adel found me a job at the Regional Financial Agency. I worked at the mail department of the unit for single mothers and families with many children. My responsibility was writing responses to letters.

I was trying to figure out whether it was possible to have the issue of our apartment resolved. But I soon realized that we wouldn't be able to get back our apartment. I took some proofreading work to do at home. Then there was an occasion to get a proofreading job in Germany. At the end of 1946 I went for an interview at the Central Committee and they asked me about my relatives. Lyonia Elizarov my sister Sonia's husband was in the rank of colonel and deputy commandant of Berlin. My brother was at the front. I gave my consent to go to work at the German printing house publishing our books in Leipzig. I was to go there with Shura Bobrenko, as there were two vacancies. We arrived in Berlin, but nobody was waiting for us there. I asked the military office at the railway station to call Elizarov. I talked with him and he sent a car to pick us up. It was a posh car and we drove to Parkov, where the Elizarovs were living in a posh mansion of a former Nazi. According to our standards they had gorgeous life, good food and clothes. Lyonia was in the rank of colonel and held the position of deputy commandant of Berlin. He worked a lot and Sonia stayed at home. I hadn't seen my brother for 10 years before this reunion in Berlin. Our previous meeting was in Kiev before the war. My sister Sonia was ill and she only said "Ah, you are here, too". Her youngest son Misha was one year old, Tolia was 15 and Tania was seven years old. But my sister was so depressed. She thought she wasn't quite happy with her children.

Shura Bobrenko and I went to Leipzig. We stayed at the hotel a few days and then we received our job assignment in various parts of the country. Shura and I first got our assignment in Weimar, and from there Shura was sent to Eisenhau and I went to Erfurt. I worked at the printing house in Erfurt. They were printing ABC Book and History of the party textbooks. A German asked me once "Do your children eat them?" meaning the textbooks – there were millions of them published. I replied that we had many children in our country and they needed textbooks. Soon afterward Lyonia asked me to come to Berlin. My sister Sonia went to take some medical treatment in Moscow and he needed someone to help him with the housekeeping. I was transferred to Berlin and got a job of proofreader at a newspaper.

Parkov was a closed town. In a year my sister's health improved and she returned. In 1950 our management was developing our vacation schedule. And I requested to have my vacation as soon as possible. I felt very uncomfortable in Germany and it was getting worse and worse. When Elizarov heard about it he told me that if I went when I planned I wasn't going to be back. He said it would take the Soviet authorities about half a year to reissue all necessary documents and I would have to wait and would have no work during this period. But I was eager to go home in Kiev. I knew I wasn't going to come back anyway. I had some money in the bank and I had enough clothes and shoes. The first thing I did after I came back was to buy a trip to Sochi. Then I returned to Kiev to look for a job. It was already difficult for a Jew to find one. It was the period of struggle against cosmopolitanism and "doctors' case". 1950s – the period of anti-Semitism on a state level in the USSR. I had to accept the vacancy of assistant proofreader at the "Soviet Ukraine" printing house. I also resumed my studies at the University in 1951. My co-student Olia Dombrovskaya was a foreman of proofreaders at the "Komsomol Znamia (flag)" newspaper and she offered me a job in her crew.

Stalin died in 1953. We had a meeting at work and the people were crying. Many thought it was the end of the world. I was quite calm about Stalin's death, but I did feel some concern about the future.

In 1956 I graduated from the philological faculty of the University. I studied there by correspondence. There was a vacancy of an editor, but our Chief editor didn't promote me to this position. He found an error in the proofreaders' work, said that I was responsible for it and fired me. It was the period of anti-Semitic campaign already. Some kind acquaintances helped me to find a job at the "Rainbow" magazine (published articles and fiction) and from there I went to the "Sport newspaper". However, editor of this newspaper had a meeting at the Central Committee of the party and they said to him "Is it a synagogue of the newspaper? There are too many Jewish names". And I was fired again.

I was renting a room from my relative, but I was already in line for those that needed an apartment in Shevchenkivskiy district in Kiev. In the long run I received a room at a communal apartment in Turgenevskaya Street in the center of Kiev after I returned from Germany. Quite a long time later, when I was about 40 years old I received an apartment. I got another job where I could make some additional money. It was at the studio of scientific popular films. Later I was offered the editor's position in Ukrainian advertising program. We were a team there. We celebrated Soviet holidays together and issued wall newspapers. Once we decorated our wall newspaper with hexagonal paper snowflakes. The party unit leader called the artist and said that those snowflakes reminded Magendovid and demanded to remove the newspaper. This was the period of the 1970s.

I have always been indifferent to politics. I never wanted to join the Communist party. I wasn't attracted either by their ideas or benefits for a career. Back in 1945 I was offered to join the party, but I refused. I have no regrets about it. This party caused so much mischief in our long-suffering country!

Besides Ukrainian advertising program I did translations into Ukrainian and my works were published in "Ukraina" and "Universe" magazines. I retired in 1977.

Adel and I were very close. Her son Sima worked at a design company in Kiev after graduation from Kiev Engineering and Construction Institute. In 1978 he moved to Israel with his family and then to the US and finally to Toronto, Canada. Adel was left alone. She never got married again. I had no family and no children. I often went to visit Sonia and Lyonia Elizarov in Moscow. They returned from Germany some time in the 1960s. They lived in perfect harmony. Our Sonia died in Moscow in 1980. Her children Tolia and Tania Elizarov and their families live in Moscow. Tolia graduated from Moscow University and became an oceanologist, Doctor of Sciences. Tania became a teacher. Tolia's daughter Olia is a teacher at school. She has a son. Tolia is a great grandfather now. He is 70. Lyonia Elizarov is a great-great-grandfather. He is 96. My brother Yakov died in Moscow in 1993. He was a famous Journalist. My Adel died that same year.

My pension is 181 hrivnya (\$35). This is a little bit more than an average pension. I have a higher pension as a veteran and invalid. Chesed also supports me. They entertain us, give us some food. We go to the "Warm house" for dinner twice a week. I am almost blind now and Chesed helps with tapes - they have a wonderful collection of tapes. I listen to the tapes about the history of Jewish people and I understand that we must be proud of our talented and heroic people. They protect Israel from Arabs and they have always protected it from any attacks and Israelites have come out

winners. And now they say that they've occupied Arabic territories. And how about the Kuril Islands? Or Kenisberg? Then give those back and let's then talk about occupation. They are heroes in Israel.

My parents paid the price of their life and 6 million Jews gave their life for Israel to be. I believe in God. They paid for this land with their lives. It would be a dream to go to Israel and die there. It is too late now. I am 80 years old and an old woman like me is no big gift for Israel. I am a patriot of Israel. I want Ukraine to be a prosperous country. But even more so, I wish Israel to do well. But I can't go there. My Yiddish is very poor and I won't be able to learn Hebrew. As for Germany, I wouldn't go there for all tea in China and I wouldn't speak German. Moving to Germany is out of the question.

My nieces and nephews love me and visit me: Tania Elizarova, Sima Goihman, Sasha Usherenko, Yakov's younger son. Sasha's daughter Katia is planning to visit me this fall. She works in Germany. Tania's daughter is an architect. Her designs are published in the "World's Best Interiors" almanac. Yakov's older son Lev worked at the design office of Aircraft Engine construction plant in Omsk. He became Chief designer and then worked as director of this plant for some time until he retired. Tolia Elizarov is an oceanologist. He was director of the Soviet Union Institute of Oceanology at a time. Now he is 75, but he still has an office in this institute. He is Doctor of Sciences and he traveled all over the world.

I'm very proud of my family. There have never been any scoundrels or traitors in our family. There have been no executioners or informers among our kinship. My life is incomplete without children, but I couldn't have any. I have many relatives abroad. Uncle Haims children Boris, Sonia, Matvey and Lilia and the children of Semyon Grinberg are in Baltimore. Naum Bernadskiy, Hai-Ginesia's son and his children are in Israel. My father's grandchildren do not identify themselves as Jews. Lyova Usherenko lives on his pension and grows vegetables to make ends meet.