Rosa Vexler’s Grandmother Surah Abramson, Sisters Sonia And Tamara

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My father’s family lived in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My grandfather Gersh Abramson was born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1876. I don’t know what family he came from. My grandmother Surah was born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1880. I don’t know her nee name or anything about her family. I’ve only seen a photograph of my grandmother’s sister Nehama. Nehama left for America in 1900s. She wrote letters to my grandmother and sent her a photo once. Nehama got married in America. She had a daughter. That’s all I know about Nehama. She stopped writing for some reason. My grandmother and grandfather got married in 1900. In 1901 my father David, their only son, was born. They also had two daughters: Rosia, born in 1903 and Nehama, born in 1905. My grandfather was a Shamesz at the synagogue. He was very religious. He prayed every morning and evening at the synagogue. Every month he made a contribution to the synagogue from his earnings. Besides, my grandfather helped the poor, although the family was far from wealthy. He believed it to be his duty to help those that were poorer than his family.

My grandfather was a short, gray-haired and bearded man. He wore a long black jacket, a black hat and a yermolka (little cap) underneath his hat. My grandfather died when I was 5. I have clear memories of my grandmother. She wore long dark skirts and dark high-collared and long-sleeved sweaters. She wore a dark shawl on weekdays and a white silk shawl going to the synagogue. My grandmother was a housewife. They didn’t keep any livestock.

I have dim memories of the house where my father’s family lived. It was a big wooden house near the synagogue in the center of Mogilyov-Podolskiy. The house was flooded during a big flood in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1932. The flood warped the house and it remained in this bent forward position. Mogilyov-Podolskiy was rather a big town at that time. There were brick and stone buildings, stores, a theater and a restaurant. Its population constituted over 50 000. There was a big market. Vendors from all surrounding villages were selling their food products and crops there. There were many Jews in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Jews constituted approximately half of the population. Basically, inhabitants of Mogilyov-Podolskiy were handicraftsmen and farmers. All tailors and shoemakers in Mogilyov-Podolskiy were Jews. Jews also kept small stores selling food products, clothing and shoes, etc. They lived in peace with Moldavians and Ukrainians. There were no national conflicts. There also was a Christian Orthodox church. People in Mogilyov-Podolskiy respected national traditions of one another.

My father went to the cheder and my sisters had teachers at home. The children got both religious and secular education. My father and his sisters finished a Jewish secondary school (8 years). My father’s family spoke Yiddish at home and Russian with their non-Jewish neighbors. Mogilyov-Podolskiy was a Jewish town. Jews constituted half of the population.

The children began their professional education at an early age. My father was a tailor's assistant when he was still at school. Rosia and Nehama became apprentices at the sewing shop. Sewing became their profession.

The family was religious. They observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish traditions. On Saturday the family went to the synagogue. The synagogue was a big two-storied building. My grandmother always made a festive meal on Saturday and on every Jewish holiday. My grandmother followed the kashrut strictly. My father and his sisters were raised very religious. I remember Sabbath at my grandparents'. My grandmother lit two candles and then we all sat at the table full of delicious food. I don't remember many details – only lots of delicious foods, nice cookies and sponge cakes. I also remember Rosh Hashanah at my grandparents' place. We had apples dipping them into honey.

Before and after the revolution of 1917 there were Jewish pogroms in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My father told me that bandits were breaking into the houses. Their victims were mainly vendors. They took away their possessions and even killed people sometimes. My father hardly escaped once. He told me that bandits broke into the synagogue early in the morning once slaughtering all Jews. This was the time for the morning prayer. My father and few others jumped out of the window. People lost many acquaintances and relatives. My father told me that this gang called themselves a punitive force unit. This was one of the biggest pogroms. Fortunately, none of our family suffered from the pogroms.

The revolution of 1917 didn't change the life of the family significantly. The authorities didn't touch my father's family – his relatives were tailors and could hardly make ends meet.

My mother's family lived in Yaryshev, a small Jewish town in 15 km from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My mother's father Urtze Brener was born in Yaryshev in 1875. My mother's family was a clothing designer. My grandmother Reizl, Rosa, was born in 1880. I don't know her nee name or anything about her family or where she came from.

My grandfather was always dressed elegantly and fashionably. He always wore well-ironed trousers, a black vest and black jacket. He was a slender, gray-haired and bearded man. He always wore a black hat. My grandfather made clothes for the whole family. My grandmother wore beautiful clothes. She had fashionable gowns and suits made by my grandfather. My grandmother was a beautiful woman even when she was old. My grandmother didn't wear a wig, but she always covered her head with a shawl, when went to the synagogue.

My grandparents had four daughters. Their oldest daughter Leya was born in 1902. I didn't know her. She left for America before the revolution when she was in her teens. There were Jewish organizations of young people that promoted emigration of young people. My mother Nehama was born in 1907. Her sister Hana was born in 1908 and the other sister, Perl - in 1910.

My grandfather worked a lot. He was the only fabric cutter for many villages. Other tailors invited my grandfather to cut their fabrics. My grandfather also had a small shop. He hired few seamstresses for help and worked there himself. My grandfather often went to other villages on business for few days. Due to his hard work the family was wealthy. My grandmother did a lot of charity work. She provided charity meals for few neighbor families at her home, few children from

poor families came to get meals at her home and she also collected second-hand clothes for the poor. My grandfather was also saving for old age.

After the revolution of 1917 my grandfather had a hard time. He gave away all his gold and jewelry to the Soviet authorities when an order to do so was issued. But it was not the end of his mishaps. He was arrested and kept under arrest for quite a long time. The authorities demanded that he gave away all his gold. They were sure he had a lot. My grandfather was tortured, beaten and his fingers were squeezed with a door. He had few fingers broken. They realized that he didn't have anything left and let him go. After my grandfather was finally released he couldn't work for a long time. But they didn't touch the family.

My mother and her sisters received education at home. They spoke Yiddish in their family, but they also knew Russian and Ukrainian. My mother's family was religious. My grandmother and grandfather observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays and taught their daughters to honor traditions. The daughters were raised religious. My mother and her sisters also finished Jewish school (8 years). Although my grandfather could provide well he insisted that his daughters learned dressmaking. When my mother finished school at 14 my grandfather sent her to become an apprentice of a very good dressmaker in Uman. My mother studied there a year and got a job of a seamstress at a shop. My mother's younger sisters also learned sewing. All 3 of them worked at the same shop near the house. My grandfather came there to show his daughters his work techniques.

My grandmother had a lot of work to do at home. She cooked on a big white tiled stove. All food she made on the stove tasted deliciously. On Friday my grandmother cooked for Saturday. She kept ceramic pots with food in the stove to have warm food on Saturday when it was not allowed to make fire and warm up the food. On winter my grandmother called a Ukrainian neighbor to make a fire in the stove and paid him for this work. My grandmother also gave meals to a son of her poor Ukrainian neighbors. My grandmother also baked bread. She taught me to bake bread and I made bread after the war when it was impossible to buy.

On Saturday and on holidays the family went to the synagogue. My grandfather also prayed at the synagogue twice a day: before breakfast in the morning and in the evening. My grandmother and her daughters prayed at home on weekdays. Every member of the family had a seat at the synagogue. I don't remember celebrations at my grandparents' home, but I believe my mother kept and observed all traditions that she was taught by her parents.

My mother told me how she met her future husband. On a big holiday my father came from Mogilyov-Podolskiy to the synagogue in Yaryshev to pray. There was a big synagogue in Yaryshev and many people came to listen to the honored rabbi of Yaryshev. The synagogue was next to my mother's house. My father saw my mother and introduces himself to her. They liked each other and my father asked her if she didn't mind moving to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Soon he sent matchmakers to my mother's parents and they began preparations to the wedding. My parents got married in 1925. My mother was 18 and my father was 19 years old. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. My grandfather Urtse was marrying off his older daughter and wanted her wedding to be remembered. The rabbi of Yaryshev conducted the ceremony. There were kleizmers at the wedding. The wedding party lasted for 3 days. All inhabitants of the town attended this wedding. After the wedding my parents moved to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. They lived with my father's parents for a short while until

they rented a dwelling.

I was born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy, Vinnitsa region, on 19 June 1927. I was the first daughter and was named after my grandmother Reizl. At that time according to the tradition it was the mother that gave name to her first child. If it was a boy he was named after the mother's father and a girl was named after the mother's mother. In 1930 my sister Surah (Sonia) was born. She was named after my father's mother. My father was a tailor at a state sewing shop. My mother was a housewife. We spoke Yiddish in our family. Yiddish is my mother tongue. Later I learned Russian and Ukrainian. In my early childhood my grandfather came to pick me up to go to the synagogue. I was his first granddaughter and my grandfather loved me a lot. He introduced me proudly to his acquaintances at the synagogue. My grandfather Gersh died in early spring 1932, right before the flood. I was 5 years old. My grandfather was buried according to the Jewish ritual. He lay on hay in the room several days. Many people came to his funeral. He was a respectable man in the town.

My parents didn't live long in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. In early spring 1932 there was a big flood. The Dnestr River flooded all riverside areas. The house that my parents rented was severely damaged. All crops were washed off resulting in famine in summer 1932.

My father's colleague suggested that we moved to the village of Serebrinets in 15 km from Mogilyov-Podolskiy, a small Ukrainian village where a few dozens of Jewish families were living in the center. There was a very small synagogue in the village. Its inhabitants treated us very nicely. My parents agreed. My father was a tailor and made clothes for all local authorities for free. This allowed us to receive a good house and half a hectare of land.

After we moved to Serebrinets my mother went to work as a teacher at the kindergarten. She had fluent Russian and loved children. My sister and I went to the kindergarten where my mother worked. We weren't starving. Children and teachers got meals at the kindergarten. We mostly ate the previous year crop over frozen and rotten potatoes, but it was still some food. My father worked at the tailor in a shop and earned well. He worked from morning till night to provide for the family. My father kept praying in the morning and in the evening and went to the synagogue on Saturday.

We talked Yiddish at home when we were on our own. If there was a visiting neighbor we switched to Ukrainian to make him comfortable.

My sisters and I grew up in a religious family. My parents were deeply religious and I am grateful that they gave me faith in God. My father and mother celebrated Jewish holidays and helped the poor. My mother strictly followed the kashrut: we had pottery for dairy and meat productsand we followed strictly the rules of kosher food. My mother went to the shoihet with her chickens to have him slaughter them.

The synagogue in Serebrinets was located right next to our house. It was a big two-storied building. Men were on the first floor and women – on the second. On Saturday somebody played the piano at the synagogue and it was very beautiful. The rabbi lived near the synagogue.

We celebrated all Jewish holidays. When my sister Sonia and I were small my mother and father went to the synagogue for a whole day on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur leaving us on our own at home. My mother didn't leave us any food on Yam Kippur and we cried form being hungry. I

couldn't understand how mother could have forgotten to give us food. And my mother said "Cry and you will cry out a good happy year". When we grew older my mother explained that it was fasting.

On the eve of Pesach my mother bought new kitchen utensils and dishes. Our casual dishes were taken to the attic for the whole period of Pesach. A huge cleanup was done before the holiday. This holiday is celebrated at the beginning of spring and symbolizes wakening up of nature and restoration of life. We had to remove all bread or breadcrumbs from the house. Everything was shining. My parents bought a lot of matzah at the synagogue to last for 8 days. We didn't have any bread in the house on these days.

We had about 50 chickens and a cow. We shepherded it in turn. We had milk and made all dairy products from it. My mother took some chickens to the shoihet and cooked chicken broth with dumplings from matzah for the holiday. She also made boiled chicken and stuffed fish. I have my mother's recipe for this fish. We also could eat boiled veal. Mother made potato, matzah and egg pudding. Pesach mother baked sponge cake from the matzah flour and strudels with jam and nuts.

The Soviet power struggled against religion. It became very acute in 1933. We were told at school that there was no God, but I knew that there is God – my parents taught me so. In 1938 the synagogue in Serebrinets was closed. Beautiful patterned windows at the synagogue were broken and there were inscriptions that there was no God on the doors. We began to make matzah at home. Jewish women that were our neighbors came to our house. They made dough from water and flour (no salt) and made matzah for our family and for our neighbors.

I also remember Sukkoth. We made a booth from branches behind the house and covered the roof with branches. We had dinner and supper there. We slept at home. When it rained the roof leaked. My father explained to me that it was to remind us of the sufferings and the history of Jewish people. We read books on the Jewish history and Kohelet from the Tanach in the shed.

On Saturday I put on my white blouse with a black ribbon and a shawl and congratulated all with Sabbath. After the meal we sang songs about peace and holiness of this holiday and the joy of being with the family. On Saturday morning we were visiting our relatives to spend time and pray with them.

My sisters and I grew up during the period of the Soviet power. We didn't go to Jewish school or had no Jewish teachers. Our father and mother filled up our souls with spiritual knowledge. We spoke Yiddish, but we couldn't write or read. Mother taught us to follow Jewish traditions and have positive attitude towards other people. My mother taught me from my early childhood to share what I had. She told me to take something you cooked to the poor before you sit down to have a meal. I still follow what my mother taught me. She also taught me to treat people nicely, not to waste energy on incorrigible people and help other people wherever possible.

The famine went on in 1933. Whole families were dying. They were not buried decently. The corpses were put on a cart and buried in trenches. There were too many dead to bury them according to the rules. There were cases when mothers ate their children having lost their mind. People were swollen from starving. They had big stomachs. Their arms and legs were so swollen that the skin cracked. I still start crying when thinking about it. It was a terrible famine in 1933.

Over two thirds of the population died. Only when the new crop grew up in 1934 the survivors began to come back to life.

My father was working day and night with my mother helping him. My mother had a poor heart and she couldn't work in the kitchen garden. So, it became the responsibility of my sister and me. People were surprised that the two of us managed with such a big plot of land. We grew potatoes, carrots, beetroots, greens and cucumbers. My parents planted a wonderful orchard near the house. We were working day and night. We didn't have any bread. We only had potatoes. Little Sonia begged me for a piece of bread saying that she could even work more if I gave her a little piece of bread. There was no other food. We went to bed hungry and cried at nights from being hungry.

In 1934 my sister Tamara was born and in 1937 - my younger sister Raya. I helped my mother to look after the babies. My mother was very weak and grew sickly.

In 1934 I turned 7. I went to the Ukrainian school. The Jewish school in Serebrinets had been closed long before. We studied all subjects in Ukrainian. There were Jewish and Ukrainian children at school and there were no national-based conflicts. We got along very well and couldn't even imagine that people could be segregated as Jewish and non-Jewish. There were often mixed marriages in the village and everybody thought it was a common thing to be.

I liked to study. I was a sociable girl and had many Jewish and Ukrainian friends. At 10 I became a pioneer. I was very proud to come home wearing my red necktie on the first day. I sang in the choir at school and participated in our amateur concerts. In the choir we sang Ukrainian songs and I also sang solo.

In June 1941 I finished the 7th form at school. I remember the first day of the war, 22 June. It was a hot day and I was weeding my garden. All of a sudden I saw a plane flying very low and some papers falling from it. Those were German fliers. German is like Yiddish. I picked up a few and took them home. They said that Germans were waging a war against zhydy and communists and that they were not going to do any harm to the population. We were scared and my mother was crying. That was how we heard about the beginning of the war. Later we heard Molotov's speech on the radio.
We didn't know what to do. We didn't have an opportunity to evacuate. The village authorities offered us a cart to evacuate by ourselves, but we were too late. Serebrinets was near the border and was occupied in few days after the beginning of the war. I went to fetch some water from the well and saw Germans on my way back. It was a hot day and they were riding on motorcycles past our house in their shirts with the sleeves rolled up. I didn't move fearing that they might take me away. I was praying and the Lord saved me.
My grandmother Surah thought that we didn't have to evacuate. She remembered Germans from WWI and told her daughter Nehama and us that Germans would do no harm to the Jews. My father's sister Rosia evacuated to the Ural. My grandmother and Nehama stayed in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. Germans shot my grandmother in her yard in 1942. Nehama managed to hide and she stayed in the cellar of her Ukrainian neighbors two years afterwards.

In about a month's time we were told to hand over our possessions and go to the ghetto in Yarushev. We gave our cow and 50 chickens to our neighbors. We had to do it in secret because if Germans found out they would have taken all we had. We left the house and our vegetable garden

with all crops. We only took some food with us. Yaryshev was located in 8 km from Serebrinets. My parents, Tamara, Raya, Sonia and I went there. In Yaryshev we settled down at the house of my mother's parents. In a month's time we were all told to stay within the ghetto. Few streets were fenced with barbed wire and were patrolled. Vinnitsa region was occupied by Germans and the areas on the other side of the Dnestr River were occupied by Rumanians. Rumanians were easier to negotiate with. They could be bribed and accepted clothes and jewelry in exchange for food products and medications. Of course, the situation there was also very hard and sad, people were starving to death and died from diseases, but there were no mass shootings like there were in German territories. Germans didn't enter into any discussions. Their only argument was using their weapons.
There were many people in the ghetto. The six of us, my mother's parents and my mother's sisters Hana and Perl were living in a small box room.
This was the death ghetto. We were starving, freezing and suffering from lice. There was no water to get washed. We were allowed to fetch water from the well between 6 to 7 o'clock. Each was allowed to take one bucket of water. There were mainly older people and children in the ghetto. Many people had typhoid. There were Jewish doctors – inmates of the ghetto, but there were no medications. Every morning people buried children that were dying from starvation and cold. All inmates of the ghetto had to wear black round tabs with yellow stars of David on a sleeve and chest. Germans shot people if they saw they had no tabs.

All people were to go to work, even old people. They were sent to different work sites: in the field or arrangement of trenches and construction of barracks. Girls of 13-15 years of age were forced to go to work every day. We worked from 8 in the morning till 5 in the evening. We sorted out peas for the kitchen, peeled potatoes and cleaned floors and windows. We received a bowl of soup and 50 grams of bread once a day for our work. This piece of bread was just two bites.
We saw beautiful 18-20 year old Ukrainian girls that Germans brought in the evening to stay overnight. They had good food, vodka and chocolate on the table. We were jealous to look at them having food and staying in a warm room. We were too young to realize that the girls were there for lovemaking. Later they were all shot.
Sometimes local farmers came to the ghetto and threw bread and potatoes over the fence. Older guys could catch this food and we were shorter and didn't get anything. My mother had some clothes to exchange for food, but they didn't last long.

I met my future husband Oscar Vexler at the ghetto. He was born in Luzhany village, Chernovtsy region, in 1920. Oscar's father Gersh Vexler died before the war. He was buried in Luzhany. I still go to his grave before Rosh-Hashanah. I never saw him, but it is my duty to come to his grave: looking after the graves of relatives is one of the duties that Jews must do. Oscar and his mother and brothers came to the ghetto with all other Jews from Chernovtsy region. Oscar told me that Jews from Chernovtsy covered the distance of 200 km. His mother Surah Vexler was a thin and sickly woman. She died in Yedintsy on the way to ghetto. My husband and I wanted to install a monument where she was buried but there is no way to determine where it is. Oscar's older brother also died during this march to the ghetto. His younger brother and he survived.

We lived in the ghetto for two years. Once we were ordered to get together in the square and Germans read their order. All inmates of the ghetto had to be in the square at 4 o'clock in the morning with gold and marks. This was autumn of 1943. People came with their children. We were

told to form columns of 4 people in line and convoyed to the old Jewish cemetery. There was a huge pit there. There were white sheets near the pit. Germans told people to get undressed to underwear and put money and valuables on one sheets and clothes – on another. My grandmother Reizl couldn't walk. Germans hit her on the head and she fainted. They threw her into the pit. My grandfather Urtse threw wedding rings onto a sheet. Germans began to shoot at the people and throw them into the pit. They had canisters with gasoline. They poured gasoline on those who tried to escape and set it on fire. There was a hill with a forest behind the cemetery. I grabbed my three sisters by their hands and we began to run. We heard shooting behind. I don't know by what miracle we escaped. We climbed the hill behind the cemetery in an instant. We only had our panties on. We decided to wait until dark to move on. We were scared and lonely. But all of a sudden I heard my mother's voice calling me. I ran behind the trees and saw my mother and father. I don't know how they managed to escape. There were about 15 people that escaped from execution. We were so happy!

At night we covered the distance of 8 km to Serebrinets. We came to the house of our Ukrainian neighbors. They let us in right away. They had to be very careful. If Germans found out that they were hiding Jews they would have killed them. For two we were hiding on the attic and in the cellar. It was a very small (maximum 10 square meters) stuffy room with no windows and a very low ceiling. Sometimes we came out into the yard at night to take a breath of fresh air. Chairman of the collective farm also knew that we were hiding in the village. He was a very nice man. He sent us bread and cereals every now and then. My father wanted to thank our rescuers and he made clothes for them and for the chairman. He also made clothes that our landlady could exchange for some food.
In 1944 the Soviet army liberated us. We came out into the yard at the daytime for the first time in two years and I had tears running down my cheeks from the sunlight. Chairman of the collective farm came immediately to tell us that we could go back to our house. There was nothing left in the house and there were no windows or doors, but it was still some roof over our heads. Later we found out that Oscar and his brother also managed to escape and were hiding in our village. They somehow managed to escape, probably in the same way as we did.

Later we found out that we were the only survivors of our big family. We had about 20 relatives in the ghetto and they were all buried in that pit: my mother's sisters Hana and Perl, my mother's parents and my father's mother. 360 people from the Yaryshev ghetto were buried there. There is a white marble gravestone with the names of all victims installed there. I go there every year before Rosh Hashanah. People come there from all over the world. A rabbi from America visits and we all pray for 360 innocent Jews. After the war I often visited our rescuers in the village to bring them gifts and medications that they needed. They passed away. Now I come to their grave at the cemetery in Yaryshev before Rosh Hashanah.

I didn't go back to school after liberation. Oscar Vexler proposed to me. He was expecting recruitment to the front and told me that he wanted me to be his wife and he would write me letters from the front. I thought it was better for us to get married after he returned from the front. But Oscar was insistent saying that he would come back from the front alive knowing that his wife was waiting for him. My parents were for it. We had a Jewish wedding, it was in 1944, for few Jewish survivors in Serebrinets. My mother made kosher food. A rabbi from Mogilyov-Podolskiy came. We had a huppah and the rabbi gave his blessings. People had fun at the wedding party. Later Oscar

and I had a civil ceremony and arranged a wedding dinner for our acquaintances and friends. This turned out to be a sad wedding. As soon as we sat at the table the postman brought call-up papers from the recruitment office for my husband and father. They were summoned to the recruitment office on the next day. We couldn't eat or party any longer.

On the next day my husband and father went to the front. My mother was very sickly. She often had heart problems. Besides my ill mother and three younger sisters my husband's younger brother lived with us. I kept crying all days long. I was responsible for all housekeeping. Studying was out of the question.

My father and husband served together in Yassy. My husband was digging trenches. My father was a tailor altering and fixing uniforms. He received more substantial food for his work. Younger soldiers received a bit of corn porridge twice a day. My father shared his food with Oscar.

Our neighbors often received death notifications from the front and when the postman came to our house I always burst into tears. I was afraid that one day there will be no letter from my husband or father and I would be noted of their death. Once I received a thank you letter from Oscar's commanding officer. Oscar had fluent German and was interpreter in his unit. He interpreted at the interrogations of German captives. My father demobilized in 1945 and my husband returned from the front in 1946.

My mother got very ill after my father returned. She stayed in hospitals most of the time and at home she stayed in bed. My father was to take care of his 3 daughters. My father couldn't cope with housekeeping and raising children was a challenge for him. I asked my husband if he had any objections if we took my sisters to our home .My husband said that it was O'K with him, but the decision had to be mine as it was me who was going to bear all responsibility. Thus, I got a big family in the first month of my family life: my sisters and my husband's brother. We moved to my husband's house in the village of Luzhany, Chernovtsy region. The house was damaged and we had to do repairs every year. We could receive an apartment in Chernovtsy, but my husband insisted that we stayed in Luzhany. My husband got a job of a nurse at the mental hospital in Chernovtsy. I did all housework. There was drought in 1947 and there was not enough food.

My father's sister Nehama lived in Mogilyov-Podolskiy after the war. She was a dressmaker at a shop. Her husband perished at the front and she had no children. Nehama was a religious woman. She had a house and arranged a pray room in it. The synagogue was closed and Jews got together in Nehama's house to pray on Saturday and Jewish holidays. We lived far from Mogilyov-Podolskiy and couldn't come there. Authorities probably didn't now anything about it. She died in 1984.

My father's sister Rosia got married before the war. She had a son – David. Rosia's husband perished at the front. She and her son were in evacuation in the Ural. After the war she and her son returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. In 1973 Rosia and her son emigrated to Israel. I don't know whether she is still alive.

My husband finished Medical College in Chernovtsy in 1949. He continued to work at the mental hospital. I was a housewife. I couldn't afford to go to study: I had to cook, do the laundry and take care of all children. I attended meetings for parents at school. In 1956 my mother died. My husband brought a rabbi from Mogilyov-Podolskiy and we buried her according to the Jewish

tradition at the Jewish cemetery in Serebrinets.

In 1957 my father remarried. His 2nd wife lived in Mogilyov-Podolskiy and my father moved there. I didn't know his wife. My father took no interest in his daughters. My sisters said that I was not their sister but mother, because I raised them. I agree.

My sisters finished secondary school. I wanted them to receive higher education. They were talented girls. The older Sonia finished Financial College after school. She got married and moved to Sosnovka, Lvov region with her husband. She took her husband's name – Shmirman. Sonia and her husband worked at the mine department. Sonia was an accountant and her husband was director of a mine. They had two daughters. Unfortunately, Sonia had a poor heart. She died in 1964. She was buried in Sosnovka. Her daughters are in Israel in Tel-Aviv. Her husband died recently. He was buried in Sosnovka. Tamara finished school with a gold medal. She entered Polytechnic University in Lvov. She graduated with the diploma of an engineer. Tamara stayed in Lvov, worked at the factory. She got married. Raya, the youngest, also finished Financial College in Chernovtsy. She moved to Lvov. Soon Raya became director of a restaurant in Lvov.

My husband was a very religious man and observed Jewish traditions strictly. He finished Jewish school in Chernovtsy before the war. He could read and write in Yiddish. Oscar grew up in a religious family. He taught me a lot. He taught me to cook kosher food. I knew this from my mother, but I never practiced – my mother used to do all cooking alone. He said to me that he would refuse to eat at home if I didn't learn to make kosher food. Now I'm teaching my granddaughter to cook. We celebrated all Jewish holidays. We fasted on Yam Kippur, lit candles at Sabbath and followed the kashrut.

In 1951 our son Gersh (Grigory) was born. My grandfather and my husband's father had this name. Circumcision was not allowed at that time, but my husband said that he would only acknowledge his son after he was circumcised. There was no synagogue in Luzhany. My husband brought a circumcision specialist from Chernovtsy. My husband's friends came and made a meal. This action was to be kept a secret from neighbors. I felt sorry for the baby – he was only 8 days old. But my husband said that our son was to be a real Jew and insisted on doing it.

I remember Stalin's death in March 1953. Many people cried and behaved as if it was the end of the world. I was surprised. We all understood that the postwar outburst of anti-Semitism was Stalin's responsibility. It wouldn't have happened if he hadn't initiated it. We remembered the «doctors' case» and understood that it was a provocation against Jews. My husband didn't face any problems in this connection. He worked at the mental hospital and his patients were violent lunatics and there would not have been many people willing to take his position. We knew that Stalin intended to deport Jews to Siberia. We believed that he could do it – he did deport the Crimean Tatars and Chechens. We didn't feel sorry for him. We knew what might have happened to us if Stalin hadn't died.

Our son studied at the secondary and music schools. His music teacher told us that he had a talent for music. My son always took part in academic concerts and was one of the best pupils. Music was his life and he never got tired of practicing. This was the period when anti-Semitism was felt already in 1960s. We were told that our son couldn't enter the music college in Chernovtsy because he was a Jew. He was invited to the music college in Ternopol, a small town in about 80

km from Chernovtsy. He went to study there. Of course, this created some problems for us. We had to pay his rent, buy him music instruments and give him money for food. My husband said that he would go to any lengths to help his son get education. Every month I went to Ternopol bringing him food and cooking. My husband and I denied ourselves in many things. We were happy that our son would be able to dedicate himself to the profession that he loved. After our son finished the college he went to the army. He served in a military orchestra. After demobilization he entered the Conservatory in Kiev. We were so happy. Our son graduated from the Conservatory in 1979. I thought he would have got a job with an orchestra. But my son loved music and children and he decided to dedicate himself to teaching other children what he had learned. My son has always identified himself as a Jew. He knew prayers and Jewish holidays. He isn't religious. He didn't go to the synagogue and didn't celebrate Jewish holidays or followed the kashrut. However, he didn't eat pork or mixed meat and dairy products. He always tried to come home on holidays and we celebrated them together, going to the synagogue and prayed at home as well.

In 1971 my father's wife died. My father was an old man and it was hard for him to go shopping, cook and do the laundry. He asked me to allow him to move in with us. I loved him and didn't have any bad feeling towards him. So, there were 3 of us: my husband, my father and I. I didn't have that much housewife and I decided to go to work. I got a job of a lab assistant at the distillery in Luzhany. I liked my work and my colleagues were very nice people.

My husband and I were very happy to hear about the establishment of Israel in 1948. The USSR was the first country in the world to acknowledge Israel. My husband said that Israel was a sacred land and the God returned it to the Jews, his Peculiar People.

In 1970s, when my son was in the army, Jews began to emigrate to Israel. It was my husband's and my dream to go. But he decided that he had to wait until our son was back home. My sister Tamara, her husband and children were the first of our family that moved to Israel. Raya joined her later. My husband and I were eager to go with them, but our son entered the Conservatory and we decided to wait again. After our son got a job assignment in Chernovtsy. My husband and I decided to join my sisters. But my husband fell ill, he had cancer. It happened so that we stayed. My husband used to tell me that doctors in Israel might have helped him if we went there. I quit my job to look after my husband. He died on 9 April 1984. My son and I buried him according to the Jewish tradition at the Jewish cemetery in Chernovtsy.

My father fell ill after my husband died. He lived another two years with me. I didn't feel so lonely while my father was alive. I learned to make injections, supported my father and read to him aloud. My father asked me to bury him near my husband. During the war they spent four years together: in the ghetto and in the army and they shared every piece of bread. My father died in 1986. I buried him near my husband. I had no more relatives left after my father died. Jews from Luzhany moved to Israel, America and Australia. My sisters lived in Israel. Raya got married there. They were both working. They sent me letters persuading me to join them.

My son got married in Chernovtsy in 1981. His wife's name is Nina and her Jewish name is Nehama. Her nee name is Borina. Nina was born in Chernovtsy in 1952. Her father Abram Borin worked at a plant and her mother Feiga Borina was a dressmaker. Nina studied at the Philological Faculty of University in Chernovtsy. She was a teacher of the Russian language and literature. Grigory and Nina had a civil ceremony and then we made a traditional Jewish wedding party at the Dnestr

restaurant. Their guests were mostly Jews. They had a huppah and there was a rabbi from the synagogue in Chernovtsy. There was kosher food and all rituals were followed. It wasn't a problem in Chernovtsy. The Jewish traditions were very strong and followed by many people. Of course, the authorities might not have been very happy about it, but what could they do? We were small common people. We were living in the village, were not rich and were not members of the Communist Party; so, we were probably of little interest to the officials.

In 1982 my grandson Piotr was born and the following year my granddaughter Svetlana, Surah, was born. My son named her after her great grandmother. My son and daughter-in-law raised their children Jewish. They both studied at the Jewish school. My son taught them music. My grandson is in Israel. He went there to study at school and decided to stay after finishing school. He served in the army and now studies at the University. My granddaughter is married. She teaches music and Hebrew at the Jewish school. Nina is a librarian at the Hesed.

My son wanted me to move in with him in Chernovtsy. He asked me to teach his wife and daughter to cook Jewish food. I sold my house in Luzhany and moved in with my son. I lived with them 4 years. I taught my daughter-in-law and my granddaughter to make traditional Jewish food. My sister Tamara sent me an invitation to Israel, but all of a sudden Tamara died of infarction. So, I stayed in Chernovtsy. It was difficult for me to live in my son's family. They are young and they want to party, have guests and have fun and I want peace. I bought a small apartment just for me for the money I had after selling my house.

I live alone, but I do not feel lonely. In the recent 10 years Jewish life has become very active. Hesed is my family. I have friends there. On Monday I work at the club of veterans of the war. On Wednesday I attend meetings. I meet with friends there. We sing songs. I remember the songs that my mother used to sing and we sing them. Once I even sang Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish songs on the radio. I feel happy when I sing.

On Friday I celebrate Sabbath at Hesed. I know prayers from childhood. I light two candles and say a prayer in Yiddish. I ask the Lord to give us peace and kindness. I also pray for peace in Israel. I have all my relatives there. After the prayer I greet everybody with Sabbath and they give me a piece of hala. I take a little piece of it and give it to the others. Then we drink wine according to the tradition and sit at tables. I am so happy to have an opportunity to talk with people in Yiddish. One couldn't even imagine that this time would come.
I also visit lonely people. They tell me what they need. If they need medical care there is a doctor that will help them and bring free medications. They also get food and clothes. There are woman that help them to do the cleaning. I always help and support the needy. I take care of 5 of such. We celebrate their birthdays at the Hesed, buy food and cook meals. These people have lived a hard life and they deserve care and attention.

It is Rosh Hashanah soon and I need to go to the cemetery. My son and I go to the cemetery in the morning before breakfast. We wash marble gravestones and put flowers. My sons says a prayer, Kaddish – it has to be said by a man. We go to my husband, my father and to all we know. We light wicks on the graves. Then I shall go to Yaryshev. We shall all pray over the marble gravestone installed on the grave of those who we shall never forget. These are sad memories, but we must never forget. We must do everything to have no repetition of it in the future.