

Vainer Lubov Biography

Lubov Wainer
Biography

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I was born in Zhytomir on 20 December 1911. I was the oldest daughter in the family of stonemason expert Leizer Gersh Broide. I was named Liba at birth, but for many years I've been called Lubov for the convenience of communication. Lubov is a Russian name and more customary in this area.

My father Leizer-Gersh Broide was born in the small Jewish town of Troyanov near Zhytomir in 1889. He was born in a common Jewish religious family that had many children. I don't know my father mother's name or anything about her family. She died in Troyanov in 1915 when she was 60 years old. I have never seen her. All I know is that she got married when she was 15, she was very religious and had 12 children. Only six of them survived. My father's father Shaya, born in 1860, was a very religious and shy man too.

They lived in a small house that was always shiny clean on Friday. My grandmother covered her head with a clean shawl, lit candles and they all sat at the table. My grandfather said prayers. Yiddish was the only language they spoke. My grandfather took any job to provide for his family: he sewed and worked at the wood cutting facility, but the family still was very poor. All of their sons studied at the cheder – that was all my grandfather could afford. When they grew up they went to Zhytomir. It was easier to find a job in a bigger town.

My father's older brother Shulim, born in 1880 resided in Khlebnaya street in Zhytomir. He worked at the woodworking factory. Woodworking and furniture industry was very developed in Zhytomir. I have dim memories of this uncle of mine. He had died before 1930 and I don't know anything about his family. My father's brother Iosif, born in 1891 was better off. He was selling timber. He lived in Zhytomir. He had two wives – both of them died. He had two sons: Aronchik and Izia. Izia perished at the front during the Great patriotic War. Aronchik returned home after the war. He was wounded at the front and came back home an invalid. He died from his wounds shortly after the war. My uncle Iosif died in 1977.

Two younger brothers of my father Ihl, born in 1892 and Srulik born in 1894 were shoemakers, I believe. During the famine of 1930s they moved to Kostyshev town (30 km from Zhytomir) and lived there. I don't know what happened to them later.

My father's sister Ratsia, born in 1895, was the youngest in the family. She got married and moved to Olevsk. She was a housewife. Her two daughters became doctors: Maya was an eye doctor and Asia – general physician. I met with them once after the war in Yevpatoria (Crimea) where they were residing. They are my cousins, but we never kept in touch. Aunt Ratsia died from cancer in Zhytomir in 1960.

All members of my father's family treated each other nicely and supported each other in hard times. After my grandmother died Iosif took my grandfather Shaya to his home in Zhytomir. My grandfather died there during an epidemic in 1920.

My father was a stonemason in granite quarry near Zhytomir. A special sort of granite was crushed by a stone mill. My father made stone mills. It was hard work. Besides, stone mason workers fell ill with an occupational illness of miners - silicosis [lung disease - when the finest particles of stone get into lungs]. Father had this disease for many years.

My mother Shendlia (nee Feldman) was born in 1891. Mother's family came from Sarny. This town hidden in the woods and swamps of the Northern Polesie, was located within the boundaries of Jewish residential area. My mother's mother died at childbirth in 1899. She died at 28, when my mother, her oldest daughter, was eight, giving birth to her youngest daughter Malka. She had 7 children. My grandfather Avrum became a widower.

My grandfather Avrum Feldman was born in 1865. He studied at cheder like all other boys in Sarny. My grandfather was a smart young man. He studied by himself and worked at the woodworking factory. It was a respectable work for that time. My grandfather had a brick house in the central street in Sarny not far from the synagogue where my grandfather had a seat of his own. After my grandmother died my grandfather was raising his children. He didn't marry again. Malka's wet-nurse, a poor Jewish woman that had a baby and a Jewish housemaid were living in the house, too. They spoke Yiddish at home, but my grandfather also knew Hebrew. My mother remembered her father praying with an ancient book in front of him. The children were not to bother him at that time. All of the boys: Shaya, born in 1892. Nyunia (1893), Marcus (1895) and Lyolia (1896) went to the cheder. Girls were educated at home. They had a Jewish teacher that was teaching them to read and write in Yiddish and Russian. The girls were learning housekeeping, cooking and sewing. The family was fond of music and they had a teacher of music coming to teach the boys to play the violin and piano, (they had an old piano left to them by some relatives). Mother was very talented. She was present at her brothers' classes and learned notes and to play the violin. She never parted with her violin since then, and now my son (he is a violinist) has my mother's violin.

My mother's older brother Shaya became a violinist and was a teacher at the music school in Zhytomir. Sarny is in 50 km from Zhytomir. During the war she was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk (Ural) with our family. The frosts were severe there. Once he went to the forest to pick up some wood and froze to death. Other people found him in the forest. We grieved a lot after him. This happened in winter 1942. He didn't have a family.

My mother's brother Nyunia also became a violinist, he perished in Lvov in 1941 when fascists occupied the town. He wasn't married. Lvov was in a foreign country before 1939 and we didn't know anything about his life.

Marcus, her next brother became a flutist. He played in orchestras at opera theaters in many towns. His Jewish wife Musia was a housewife. Their daughter Maya, born in 1937 resides in Minsk. She was a musician and is retired now. Before the war Uncle Marcus got a job in the orchestra of the theater in Cheliabinsk. All members of the family were staying with him in Cheliabinsk. In the last years of his life Uncle Marcus worked as a flutist in the Minsk Opera Theater. He died in Minsk in 1983.

My mother's younger brother Lyolia, a dental mechanic, perished in Sarny in 1941. Germans shot all Jewish population of the town. That's all I know about him.

When in 1909 my mother got married and moved to Zhytomir her younger sisters Hana and Malka were growing in our family. It was a tradition with Jewish families that older children were raising the younger ones. Malka got married when I was 9 or 10 years old. Her husband name was Plotnik. It was a hard period of 1920s, but Malka had a traditional Jewish wedding.

My mother, her sisters and neighbors were cooking for a few days for the wedding: tsymes (carrots with onions and prunes), sweet and sour stew, stuffed fish and radish with goose fat, strudels and lekah (big honey cakes). Mother made a dress for Malka from white flowered calico with gauze frills. The fiancé came to the wedding to Zhytomir from Sarny where he was working at the woodcutting factory. He was young and handsome. He was wearing a silk shining kipah on his curly hair. I was staying close to the bride. When the rabbi was leading the bride and bridegroom to the huppah the people were rejoicing and singing. Mother and her brothers were playing the violins and flute. My grandfather Avrum was ill and couldn't attend the wedding. After the wedding Malka and her husband went to his parents in Sarny. After WWI Sarny belonged to Poland. Therefore, it was a foreign country and I didn't see Malka any more. Malka, her husband and two children were shot in Sarny in 1941.

My mother's sister Hana, born in 1897, was a housewife. Her husband Isaak worked as a locksmith at the plant. He perished in 1941, in the first days of the Great Patriotic War. Hana's son Shura, born in 1925, worked at Cheliabinsk aviation plant. He was 16 and went to the front as a volunteer. During the war my aunt was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk with us. When Aunt Hana got to know that he was severely wounded and stayed in hospital in Tbilissi she went to see him there. Shura got well and entered law department at the University after the war. He got a diploma and worked as lawyer. He married a Jewish girl and they had two sons. Hana stayed with them in Tbilissi. We corresponded with them all this time. Shura visited us. Aunt Hana died in Tbilissi in 1985.

My parents met in Zhytomir. It was a tradition then that young people were introduced to one another by "shathine" – matchmakers. My father was a stonemason and Mother lived in Sarny. Her father took her to Zhytomir, following the recommendation of a matchmaker, to introduce her to the fiancé. They liked each other and had a traditional Jewish wedding in 1909. I believe, they had a wedding quite like the one of Hana that I attended. After their wedding my parents rented an apartment in Zhytomir. My father went on working and Mother was a housewife.

My parents had three children. I am the oldest one, born in 1911. My brother Yakov (Yankel) was born in 1913. He didn't go to cheder. Cheder was closed in 1922. My brother studied at the Jewish secondary school in Zhytomir, then he finished a commercial college, but decided to get another profession and entered Kiev Construction Institute. He studied two years, but the family couldn't afford to continue his studies. Yakov quit the Institute and went to work. He worked at the construction materials factory where he was promoted from a worker to shop supervisor. He spent so much time at work and was so devoted to it that he even didn't get married. During the war he went to the front. After he returned he went to his previous work at the factory. At one time he even lived at the factory. Yakov visited me on all Jewish holidays, and we celebrated them together. He wasn't religious, but every occasion was good to get together and recall our parents and childhood. My brother Yakov died in Kiev in 2000. We were always friends and his death was a

huge loss for me.

My younger brother Alexandr was born in 1924. He studied at an Ukrainian school in Zhytomir. Jewish schools had been closed. Later he studied at law department of Kiev University by correspondence. He worked as a legal adviser in Dovbush (Zhytomir region) for many years. He married Bronia, a Jewish woman. In 1952 his daughter Larissa was born and in 1953 he had another daughter – Zhanna. Both of them graduated from Kiev Polytechnic Institute. In the early 1980s they moved to Canada and then to Chicago (USA). My brother Alexandr died in 2000. His wife still calls me from Chicago on Jewish holidays. Every now and then my nieces call me. There is no one left to talk about our childhood and life in Zhytomir.

When we lived in Zhytomir we used to have family gatherings on holidays and every Friday. Mother lit candles and laid the table to celebrate Sabbath. Somebody said a prayer. We, children, listened to the prayer after the first star appeared in the sky (Father always knew the exact time), had dinner and went to another room. The adults remained at the table having their discussions. There was nothing special at the table. We were poor and couldn't afford much. But I wouldn't say that my parents were religious. However, we always celebrated Pesach at the festive table with fancy dishes. We always had matsa at Pesach. I even remember our mortar (ferfeleh) where we crushed matsa. Mother made bakeries from matsa flour that were all kosher food, of course. At Yom-Kipur we didn't eat anything and prayed. Father and Mother went to the synagogue. Father had a thales. He put it on to pray. I don't remember whether any other holidays were celebrated in the family. I went to the synagogue with Mother. I didn't pray there, I was just looking around. It was a small beautiful synagogue.

Zhytomir was the town of Polish, Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish population. We were treated nicely. In our neighborhood we were the only Jewish family, but we never heard a word of abuse from anybody. We treated people nicely. People liked Father and got along well with other people. I grew up in that neighborhood and we never had any problems. There were fearful moments when Petlura soldiers broke into the house. We stayed quietly in the apartment and didn't open the door when they were knocking. Red army was no better. They stole Father's boots once. They were scoundrels in those armies.

We had many Jewish books in Yiddish: Sholem Alechem, Mendele Moishe Sphorim, Itshak Perets, etc. We spoke Yiddish at home, but we knew Russian well. Father and Mother read a lot. I was fond of reading, I can still read and write in Yiddish. My children don't know Yiddish, though. They never took any interest in it. When I say something in Yiddish they ask me to translate. It's a pity.

We lived in a house in Kashperoskaya street. I don't remember the house or furniture – they must have been plain. There was a back entrance to the kitchen. We had a big samovar. I remember I cleaned it with a brick. Mother cooked delicious stews and broth on the stove. The food was more delicious than now when it's cooked on gas. Mother baked delicious rolls and strudels. Unfortunately, we only had delicious food at Pesach and children's birthdays. We were having a hard time, because Father was ill, and he couldn't work. Our relatives could provide no assistance to us – they were poor. We didn't have any money and had to eat cow's food – makukha. I had a miserable childhood. We were poor and it was the time of the civil war (1916-1919) and desolation.

I went to school in 1918. We had a very good Jewish school and the children were nice. We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at school, as we celebrated Soviet holidays: the October revolution day,

1st of May – Labor Day, the Commune of Paris Day – 18 March. We got together at school to go to the parade singing revolutionary songs and carrying red flags. I finished school in 1926. We could speak and write in Yiddish and studied all subjects in Yiddish. It was formally called a Jewish school and studying subjects in Yiddish was probably the only aspect that made it Jewish. I never was a pioneer and never went to pioneer camps. I attended a ballet studio and was very fond of it. It was a free ballet studio and our ballet master was Schagunsky. We performed at concerts in clubs, schools and factories. I danced “Chardash” of Monty, a Hungarian dances. After school I went to the Jewish Pedagogical College in Zhytomir. I finished it with the diploma of pre-school tutor.

I was learning to play the piano at one time. We had an old piano at the apartment. Rabinovich, a Jew, was my music teacher. But it didn’t last long. My father was ill and the family couldn’t afford to teach me any longer. I went to work at the private stocking shop to support my family when I was 15 years old. I took some work home: we were rubbing paraffin into the stockings and ironing them. I bought a blue sweater for the first money that I earned. I was happy. I was young and managed a lot.

In the evening we went to the Jewish club. We were very fond of the “Blue Blouse” performances [popular in the 1920s amateur propagandistic performances, ridiculing the bourgeois imperialists and our own drawbacks]. Our director Presman was a very talented young actor. Later he moved to Kiev and became a famous actor at the musical comedy theater, We performed in Russian and Yiddish and sang “We are sinebluzniki (blue blouse people), we are not profsoyuzniki (trade union people), we aren’t fine fellows, we are just screws of a great joint of all working people land” I continued to attend the ballet studio and I was fond of the ballroom dances. In this dance club I met my future husband, Mordko Shaya-Elevich Wainer, a Jew. Mordko was very handsome.

My husband was born in May 1911 too. His father Shaya Elevich, a shoemaker, lived in Berdichevskaya street in Zhytomir. Their family was rather wealthy and moderately religious. His mother Sura-Leya, a Jew, died from a disease in 1920. I never saw her. They had three sons: Grisha, Efim and Mordko. All 3 sons of this shoemaker from Zhytomir were very handsome, slim and tall. They finished the Jewish secondary school and became sailors. Grisha was promoted to high ranks. he died in Sevastopol in 1968. Efim served at the Pacific Ocean fleet. We don’t know what happened to him.

We fell in love at first sight. We liked each other. We met for two years and then got married in 1928. Any traditional wedding was out of the question at that time of struggle against religion. Mordko was a Komsomol activist and atheist and we believed traditional Jewish weddings to be vestige of the past. Mordko finished the college on the use of land in Zhytomir and was sent to work in Smela. I moved there, too, and worked at a Russian kindergarten. We rented a small room in a house. Our landlords were religious Jews. Once I spoiled their borsch (beetroot soup). I didn’t like cooking. They made borsch at Pesach and I stirred it with other than Pesach spoon. The landlady was angry and made a scandal.

We stayed in Smela for less than a year. My husband was recruited to the army in 1930 and sent to the Navy in Kronshtadt [a Navy base on an island near Petersburg]. The Navy was in need of educated people and my husband was sent to take an officer training course. He became a professional sailor. I joined him in Kronshtadt. We lived in 12, Flotskaya street. Only commanding officers lived there. We lived in the house with a long corridor and one-room apartments on both

sides of it. It was very clean, one could sleep on this floor, so clean it was. There was a huge common kitchen with two stoves. We had little furniture: an iron bed, a table, four chairs, a wardrobe and a book stand. All neighbors were friends. We were young and optimistic and we trusted the Soviet power. My husband's service lasted four years there. I worked as a teacher at the kindergarten for officers' children. This was a challenging work, because these were the children of the commandment. The children were raised to be devoted to the Soviet power. We were convincing them that our socialist Motherland was the best in the world. New Year celebration was canceled as vestige of the past, but we celebrated Soviet holidays with great enthusiasm. The working day of a teacher lasted four and a half hours. When it was time for the children to take their afternoon sleep we left to be replaced with nurses that came in to take care of the children. I had lunch in the kindergarten. After work I went to see my husband at the military unit. My husband was a very respectable man. He was artillery lieutenant. I usually take the route across Yakornaya square. The Red Navy military were marching and singing a very popular song. These were my happy times of such carefree life.

I didn't feel that I was a Jew. I even received a bonus for excellent performance and I went to the resort Golaya Pristan near Kherson for the first time in my life.

In 1934 the Dnieper Navy Fleet was established in Kiev. 11 families were sent to reside in Kiev. We were among them. We lived in Krasnaya square at Podol not far from the Dnieper. We lived in the hostel for about 300 people that was specifically built for the families of Navy military. Each family had one room to live and there was a common kitchen on each floor. We were living like a family there. The Fleet commandment also lived there. There was a club for commanding officers and I got a job of a cashier there. I also attended an amateur dance group. We had beautiful parties. In 1937 I went to work at the kindergarten of our Fleet. I loved children and they liked me a lot. Children always know whether they are loved.

There were few Jewish commanding officers. I didn't quite identify myself as a Jew, but I had an urge for observing Jewish traditions. I loved Jewish holidays. I liked matsa and all delicacies that could be made from matsa. I always fasted at Yom-Kipur. I remembered the dates from the time when they were celebrated at my parents' home. I went to the synagogue in Podol. I didn't tell anybody that I went there. It was my own business. Only my husband knew about it. If it became public knowledge, my husband and I could be fired. I used to stand there a whole day when I was praying. I went to the second floor and stayed there until evening – this was mandatory for me. Judgment Day is a big holiday for us and I prayed for my loved ones: for the living and for the dead.

I got pregnant in 1935 but I fell ill with pneumonia, had a cough that resulted in miscarriage. In 1938 our son Arnold was born. My mother came from Zhytomir and told me that it was a Jewish tradition to name babies in honor of close deceased relatives. She wanted it to be Avraam, but this wasn't a popular name at our time and we decided to have one letter "A" left in the name. I called my son Alek. Well, there was no anti-Semitism and nobody persecuted or teased us, but we tried to keep quiet about our being Jews. We were inspired by the idea of internationalism and equality. All nations were equal in the Soviet Union. After our son was born we received two rooms in a communal apartment in Pechersk, a very good neighborhood in Kiev. There were 8 neighbors in this apartment, and we shared a kitchen, a bathroom and a toilet. We were always helping and supporting each other and getting along well. Before the war there were problems with food

supplies in Kiev. We received rationed food at work, and I shared it with our neighbors. There were people of different nationalities, but we didn't care. If I had to hurry to work in the morning and was cooking a meal on the stove, my neighbor would have it done for me. She couldn't cook and I was teaching her to make dumplings. We lived a nice life and had parties. I looked after her children when she went out.

It was an alarming period in the late 1940s when those arrests began. We believed the Soviet power and everything that we were told: that there were enemies and spies around, that we had to be watchful and that our Soviet Motherland was the best in the world. I remember Chief of Headquarters had a Greek wife. They said that she was against the Soviet power and a spy. Both of them vanished later. However, we were not involved in any of these processes.

My husband was away for six months. He was an artillery man and then commander of the ship. They sailed along the Dnieper, to the Black Sea and Danube. In 1941 when the war began my husband was on one his trips. We couldn't believe that it was a war. I don't remember where I was when the shooting began. I wasn't afraid of bombings. I thought it would soon be all over and we would win. There was a radio in our kitchen and we listened to the news. I knew about the war in Europe but we didn't believe that this nightmare would ever happen to us. There was an air-raid shelter in our building where we were hiding. In July 1941 my son and I left Kiev on a boat. Kiev was constantly bombed and it was dangerous to stay there. We came to Dnepropetrovsk and there was a heavy bombing there. I don't remember how I got to Kharkov. In Kharkov we stayed three days at the railway station waiting for a train. I wanted to get to Cheliabinsk, because my mother's brother Marcus was there. He was a flutist at the Opera theater. Our whole family arrived there in due time.

Mother and Father and Sasha lived in Zhytomyr before the war. Father was very ill when the war began. Mother wanted to send their youngest son to evacuation with Hana and her family. When they came to the railway station the train that they were supposed to board was destroyed by bombing. They were waiting for another train, when it occurred to Sasha that he couldn't leave his parents. He walked home and told them that he wasn't going away without them. Mother packed up, they went out and got a horse-driven cart to take Father to the railway station on it. My Mother's sister Hana was still at the station. They went to the town of Kalach near Stalingrad. Mother went to work at the canteen: she was washing dishes. Her sister also went to work. At the beginning of 1942 the front was coming near Stalingrad. I sent my parents a permit from the military office to come to Cheliabinsk and they arrived. They all came: Mother, Father, Sasha, and my mother's sister with her son Shura.

I had no news from my husband for a long time. In December 1941 I found out that the Fleet was encircled by Germans in September 1941. Some of the crew perished in the encirclement and the rest of them were captured. They were taken across Kiev to the Babiy Yar and shot. Then I understood that my husband had perished. Somebody told me after the war that some of my acquaintances saw my husband Mordko Wainer in the street when the captives were convoyed to the Babiy Yar. And he never knew that we had another son.

At first we lived in two small rooms in Cheliabinsk. We slept on the floor and turned by at the command. Then I received a room (6 square meters) as a widow of the officer that perished at the front. People in the Ural were sharing their last piece of bread with us. My second son Lyonia was born in Cheliabinsk in December 1941. I remember the hospital and remember how Mother and I

walked there. My first delivery was very difficult and lasted four days. It was different with Lyonia. Soon after he was born I joined the Ural military folk dance group. It was equal to service in the army and I was receiving rationed food. I received 700 grams of bread, more than workers and clerks. So, I was working and Father and Mother were taking care of the children. I was away on tours all the time. We performed at hospitals, plants and military units. We went across the Ural, Western Siberia and even Kazakhstan. Our director was Shwartsman, a Jew.

I danced folk dances and was a soloist at this ensemble. Kiev musical comedy theater was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk and we borrowed gorgeous costumes from them. We were working 10 hours a day, giving concerts to the wounded military in hospitals all over the Ural. We were very popular. We had a difficult life, what I was earning wasn't enough. Father got better and went to work at a vitamin plant. He was a worker there. Employees didn't get any vitamins –they were for the front, but they received some liquid vitamin wastes. He bought it home once in two weeks and we drank the liquid. It became easier when America began to provide aid [in 1942 the Soviet army was receiving aid: food, equipment and clothing]. We received some food products, tinned food and even clothes.

When the war was over I was offered to stay at the ensemble in Cheliabinsk, but I was missing Kiev and home. Besides, the climate in Cheliabinsk is unfavorable – frosts of down to 45°C. I was often ill. In 1945, after the war, we returned to Kiev. I don't remember exactly how long the trip lasted, but it must have been longer than a week. Father, Mother, my two children and I went to Kiev on a freight train. That my husband perished at the front gave me the right to claim for our apartment. I went to the military office and obtained a permit for residence. I got back one room and another room was occupied by a Russian family. They loved our Lyonia and we lived like one family for a year. Later they received an apartment and moved out. Central heating at this apartment was out of order and we only had a stove (burzhuika) to heat it.

I was trying to go on dancing at the House of Officers ballet group, but I failed. I was 35 already and I went to work at the kindergarten. I liked this work, I liked the children and I managed well at my work. Children studied poems and songs about Stalin and Lenin at the kindergarten. There were Ukrainian and Jewish children at the kindergarten. But we never touched upon the issue of nationality - never! Although it was hard and challenging work and it didn't pay well. I played the piano a little, I danced and I knew how to deal with children. Lyonia also went to the kindergarten, not the one where I worked. My younger son Lyonia was a very nice and obedient child, very different from Arnold.

My older son Arnold went to a Russian secondary school. Arnold was a difficult child, too nervous. He always made one step forward and 10 steps backwards. But he could get along with people. He didn't want to study and went to work at the conveyor at the shoe factory after the 7th form at school. Later he went to the upper secondary evening school and finished it. He worked at the factory for ten years and then he went to the shop equipment factory that manufactured refrigerators, vending machines, etc. He was a worker, but once there was a situation that the factory stopped due to lack of supplies.

Their logistics manager couldn't cope with the situation and my son brought them the supplies that they needed. My son was transferred to the logistics department.

But then, in order to get what he needed he had to drink with these people. My son took to drinking. There were scandals at home. He liked arranging things – it was what he was fond of. We, Jews, have a word “shwitsar” – it means somebody quick-minded and smart about arranging things and finding the shortest ways to have them done. His wife Beba, a Jew, born in Kiev in 1942 was a teacher of Russian primary school. 10 years ago his wife Beba insisted on moving to Canada. Beba had relatives there. In Canada Arnold works at the furniture factory. His employers value him high and he gave up drinking. Beba is a housewife. Their daughter Alexandra, born in Kiev 1976 finished a business college and works as an economist for «Hewlett Packard». My sons didn't observe any Jewish traditions. They grew up as atheists and took no interest in the Jewish traditions.

There was a barber's in the House of Officers. I took my boys to have their hair cut. While they were at the barber's I found out that there was a music school there. I took my boys for audition. It lasted about half an hour. The teachers said to me 'Well, your older son shall be an engineer and your younger one has a perfect ear – he will play the violin'. He was 5. He was granted free attendance at the music school. He played at the smallest violin and he even participated in a concert at the Palace of pioneers.

He was such a great boy! He was very assiduous boy: a Russian secondary school (they also studied Ukrainian, but Yiddish wasn't taught in the Soviet Union at that time) and music school. We led a modest life, but we managed all right. Father was working at the silk factory and was well-respected. We lived at the communal apartment. There were two other families in this apartment, but we never had any conflicts with them.

My parents and I went to the synagogue at Podol at Yom-Kipur. Mother and I were fasting, but Father didn't. He had health problems and he had to eat. But Mother and I had to stand outside the synagogue (we had no place inside and we were just listening). Sometimes we went upstairs to mix up with other Jews. The children didn't go to the synagogue. They were pioneers and pioneers (young communists) didn't attend any religious institutions. Besides, they didn't believe in God. My children didn't know Yiddish, but I spoke Yiddish with Father and Mother. My children didn't show any interest in Yiddish.

In 1953 when the radio announced that Stalin died I cried a lot, but didn't recall him afterward. We never discussed anything related to politics in the family – we were far from it. Father was working hard and Mother was very busy with the housework and children. We were happy to have had dinner and thanked God that we had a place to live. We cared not about policy.

We faced no anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism has to do with envy, and there was nothing to envy about us. Father was a worker and I was a teacher at the kindergarten. Parents of my children in the kindergarten treated me with respect, because they knew my good attitude towards their children.

In 1954 my parents died one after another. Father was a very ill man due to his work as stone mason. We buried him at the Kurenyovka Jewish cemetery. We invited an old man from the synagogue to say Kaddish (sepulchral prayer). Father was a very nice and kind man and many colleagues – Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish – came to bid their farewell. In half a year my mother died from infarction. We were alone now that my parents were gone.

Life was improving and I wanted to get married. Matchmakers shathene [Jewish women that were arranging introductions among Jews. They received money if introductions developed into a romance] (during the Soviet times they worked, but they gave their contact numbers and addresses to the people they knew well to keep this information confidential) introduced me to men, but when they heard that I had two sons, they refused from me. I even met a tailor and we met few times. But he turned out to be very greedy and I thought that my children couldn't be happy with him.

In 1964 the sister of my older brother's wife mentioned to me that she was courted by a man. Once I needed to see her to ask advice and decided to go and see her. She worked at a canteen. When I came she was sitting at the table with a man and they were having a meal. I felt somewhat uncomfortable. He was an accountant at the canteen and was helping to learn to do her work. He ran to me to take my coat and have me join them. I said that I was in a hurry, because I noticed that she was nervous. He asked me "Do you want to get married?" I replied "yes, and who doesn't?" and left. I was home when the phone rang. He was calling "But you want to get married and I know a young man that will marry you with the children. Please come to Shevchenko Blvd. now, we'll be waiting for you". Well, I went there. He was waiting alone. I asked him where my cavalier was and he said that it was him. "What do you mean - you?" He said "Yes, I liked you a lot. I met with Rita, but I never made any promises to her. I was just helping her with her work". We began to meet and I married him in 1968. Rita understood that we were in love and didn't interfere.

His name was Mihail Abramovich Shkolnik, a Jew. He was born in Nemirov, Vinnitsa region, in 1908. His parents and younger sister Riva perished in 1941 when Nemirov was occupied by fascists. He was chief accountant at the pharmacy department. He had a higher education. He finished Kiev Institute of Economy. He had two grown up daughters. His wife Fira, a Jew, died from cancer in 1962. He invited me to meet his children and they liked me, but they didn't want their father to get married. That was because he was giving them all the money he earned. So we went on seeing each other for a year. My boys liked him. Once my doorbell rang. I opened the door and saw him with his suitcase "I'm tired of it all. I have come to stay". We lived in a civil marriage for few years and then we had a civil ceremony.

He was a serious man. He lost one kidney at the front and was shell-shocked many times. He was at the front for the first to the last day of the war. He was a very good specialist in accounting and a very developed man. He liked theater and was fond of music. He liked to attend lectures and he marched in step with life. I enjoyed being together with him. I knew that he had health problems and took very good care of him. He died in 1992.

Lyonia finished music school and entered music college named after Gluier. After the college he was summoned to come to the registry office as he was supposed to go to the army. They sent him to the navy division to become a military sailor. I went to the commissar to ask him to send Lyonia to an orchestra, because he was a musician. But that commissar got angry with me and said that Lyonia would serve where he was sent. They even shaved his hair. We went home, all out and down, and were going past the House of Officers and Kiev military dance ensemble rehearsing. Musicians know each other. They reported Lyonia's situation to their commanding officer. This officer told Lyonia to not go to the military office again and that they would make all necessary arrangements. They did and Lyonia came to serve at Kiev dance ensemble and choir. He served

three years. Afterward he was selected to play at the orchestra of Ballet on ice theater. He played there 15 years. They toured a lot and he went to Czechoslovakia, Finland, etc. He fell ill when he was 26. He often had anginas with high fever. Doctors insisting on operating on his tonsils and he went to hospital. He was very sensitive and afraid of blood. He was too delicate. They had his tonsils removed and at night he started bleeding from his throat. He got so scared that he lost his mind and was sent to the Pavlov mental hospital. He had schizophrenia, this terrible disease that cannot be cured. medications can only suppress it a little. In 10 years the orchestra of the ballet on ice was disbanded and Lyonia was selected to play at the Opera studio at the Conservatory. He has worked there for 20 years. They know that he is ill and treat him nicely. When Lyonia doesn't feel well they let him go home.

In 1980 Lyonia met Sofa, a Jewish woman. She had a small daughter. They got married. There is no peace with this marriage. Sofa does not always care for Lyonia. Her daughter grew up. Got married, had two daughters and moved to Israel with her family. Sofa wants to go there, too, but Lyonia cannot change the climate or his way of life so dramatically.

I've never been in Israel, but I always watch what is going on there. We cannot move there, though. Firstly, because we don't know the language. It is a terrible feeling when people say something and you do not understand a word. The climate there is different, and I am 90 already.

I've always remembered that I'm a Jew, but nobody ever called me zhydovka. No, I was once. I was going on a bus, when a man and a woman got into the bus at a stop. He approached me and said "Zhydovka, get up!" This happened some time in 1980s when a number of Jews were leaving for Israel. I thought he was addressing someone else. He said "Haika ("haika" is an abusive slang name originating from a customary Jewish name "Haya"), get up. You have no place here. You must live in Israel". I raised my voice at him saying "You have no right to say so. I live where I want to". But I got off the train to get rid of him. I was hurt that the bus was full, but nobody spoke for me. I was a stranger in my country for the first time in my life.

I have meals at the synagogue now. We are a family there. There are Jews that even don't know Yiddish. But I communicate in Yiddish with few people. We even sing songs when we enter the canteen. I like Yiddish. Every second month we go to Hesed. Hesed is a Jewish home where we get a wonderful reception and a lot of attention. We attend concerts and lectures there. We enjoy our visits. Our body and soul rest when we are among our people. It is very interesting to be there. I don't know what I would do if it were not for the canteen and Hesed. I have a small pension and the synagogue and Hesed provide big support to us.