

Efim Zhornitskiy Biography

a

Odessa, Ukraine, 2002

I know about my grandfather on my father's side Shmerl Zhornitskiy from what my grandmother Haika and my uncles and aunts told me. My grandfather was born in Tulchin in about 1854. He studied in a cheder. He wore clothes common for Jewish men in our town: a black jacket, a cap and boots. On Saturday and on holidays my grandfather went to synagogue. He was a tailor, but a very poor one. There were quite a few tailors in the area and my grandfather didn't have many clients. My grandfather also made some additional earnings. He was a healer and often helped other people. My grandmother told me that he could even help to get rid of a corneal spot in the eye. People paid him and this was additional support to the family. My grandfather Shmerl died of some disease in 1914 when he was about 60 years old.

My grandmother Haika was born in Tulchin in 1856. I remember her well: she was short and lively and had blue eyes. She wore long skirts and dark long-sleeved blouses. She was very reserved and nobody remembered her losing her temper. She had many grandchildren and remembered all their names. She had a phenomenal memory and was aware of the situation in every family and gave unobtrusive advice to members of the family.

My grandmother and grandfather lived in the poorest neighborhood in Tulchin that was called kaptzanovka (kaptsan/kabtsan means beggar in Yiddish). The majority of the population in this town was Jewish. The town was surrounded by woods and was located in a shallow gully. The Jewish cemetery was on a hill and one could see the panorama of the town from there. There was a pond near my grandmother's house and we liked to swim in it. My grandmother's house was very old and the windows were low. There were four rooms in it: a dark bedroom with a small window, a small room, a bigger room and another bedroom. There was a kitchen with a big stove in it where my grandmother baked bread. They fetched the water from a rather distant well. There was no electricity.

My grandmother's family was religious. They went to synagogue on Saturday and on holidays. The synagogue was located near the Old Market that was not far from their house. There were several synagogues in Tulchin and my other grandmother went to synagogue near the New Market. They celebrated all Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut in the family. I remember that my brothers and I visited our grandmother at Hanukkah and grandmother Haika gave us Hanukkah gelt and various treats. After my grandfather died Haika lived with her daughter Khona and was a housewife. On Friday my grandmother and Khona baked bread and chala for the Shabbat meal. My grandmother died after she fell into the cellar when she was old. She died in 1931 when it was cold and there was snow on the ground.

My grandmother had four sons: Moisha, Shoil, Idl and Yankl and two daughters: Pesia and Khona. The sons studied in the cheder and the girls were helping their mother around the house. I don't think they had any education. The oldest Moisha was born in 1883. He went to America before 1914 and returned home. He was a tailor, but worked at home because he had some health

problems. I remember him with Jewish newspapers in his hands. He read in Yiddish. My uncle Moisha had six children. In the 1930s his middle son Yankl started working at the GPU (1) on the recommendation of the Komsomol (2) In a couple of years he got a job assignment in Piatigorsk (in the Northern Caucasus, about 1000 km from Odessa) and moved there with his family. Moisha perished during evacuation in 1943: he was crushed between two railcars. His family was in evacuation in Alma-Ata and returned to Piatigorsk after the war.

My father's next sister Pesia was born in 1885. In 1904 she married Yosl Shneiderman, my maternal grandmother's brother. They had seven children. Uncle Yosl always wore dark clothes and had a big beard. Pesia also wore dark clothes. My uncle was called Yosl Kloits (kloits means a log of wood in Yiddish) in the family. He often entered into deals that could hardly be successful. He was a fur specialist. He made fur hats and sold them. In the 1920s he opened a store in his house in Tulchin where he sold commodity goods. Yosl and his family moved into a better apartment in the center of the town in due time. After the NEP(3) was over they moved to Dnepropetrovsk in 1929. After the war he and his family often came to big family celebration to Odessa where the majority of our family lived and they were guests of honor at such family reunions. I remember uncle Yosl dancing on the table at the wedding of my cousin Manechka despite of his advanced age. He lived almost 90 years and died in 1976. Pesia died a year later. They were buried in Dnepropetrovsk. My father Shoil was a third child in the family. His younger brother Idl was born in 1890. He helped my father to upholster furniture and later got a job as shop assistant at a department store. He married my mother's sister Zlota who was born in 1892. They had two children. Some time before the Great Patriotic War (3). Idl went to the Far East to work there for 3 years under a contract. When he returned he bought an old, but solid house. There were many rooms in the house and they leased them to have additional income for the family. Zlota was a housewife. During the war Idl and Zlota evacuated with my parents to Frunze via the Caucasus, Baku and Kirghizia. Idl died in Tulchin in 1982 and Zlota died in May 1986. Their children live in Brooklyn, New York.

My father's younger sister Khona was born in 1892. When she was a young girl she fell in love with Meyer Ostrovskiy – a boy of her age, but his parents were against their son's marriage. They said to him that he would only be able to marry her after they died. She married another man who she didn't love and had a daughter: Fira . Khonia divorced her husband and earned her living by selling flour and baking bread. She married Meyer Ostrovskiy after his parents died shortly before the war. They had a son Fima. Khona and Meyer were killed in the ghetto in Tulchin. After the war Fira married and lived in her husband's family. Her husband served in the army and after he demobilized he worked as shoe designer at the shoe factory in Tulchin.

My father's youngest brother Yankl was born in 1894. He was a merchant. He lived in Dnepropetrovsk and had three children: two daughters and a son. Yankl died in the 1970s.

My grandfather on my mother's side Leib Portnoy was born in Tulchin in 1856. He owned a grocery store. He also bought up the bristle in the surrounding villages and supplied with it a number of factories. He was a successful businessman. At first he rented an apartment for his family, but then he bought a house from a Catholic priest. I remember that it was an old house. There were 3 bedrooms and a big living room in the house. There were earthen floors in the house. There were few pieces of furniture and there were many plants in pots on the floor. The house had a cellar. In winter a heap of ice was placed in the right hand corner of the cellar that was covered with sawdust. It served as a fridge in the summer. There was an orchard around the house. They did not raise any animals. They didn't have any housemaids: my grandmother and her daughters managed

with all housekeeping chores. My grandfather was a giber (strong man, hero in Yiddish). Once he was involved in fighting a fire at the cigarette factory in Uman. He climbed onto burning roof to remove sheets of iron from it when he caught fire himself. He jumped into a lake with ice cold water and caught cold. He was paralyzed and was confined to bed for a few years before he could walk again. But he couldn't walk properly, he was lame and people gave him the nickname of Leib der krimer (Leib the Lame in Yiddish). On Saturday and on holidays my grandfather went to synagogue where he had his own seat . My mother told me that my grandfather was a severe man and could not stand any objections. He was strict with the children and punished them often. He didn't want his daughters to study. He used to say that it was sufficient for a woman to be able to count the items that she was giving to a laundress. The girls grew up to be wonderful housewives and cooks. His younger daughters studied in grammar school. Times were changing and my grandfather had to give up his outdated views. In 1920 grandfather Leib fell ill with diphtheria, but nobody could diagnose this illness in Tulchin. My grandmother took him to a professor in Odessa, but it was too late. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. This cemetery was later removed, but my grandfather's photograph is on the gravestone of his son Volodia in another Jewish cemetery in Odessa.

My grandmother on my mother's side Etl Portnaya, nee Shneiderman was born in Tulchin in 1862. She was a tall thin woman. She was very religious. Before the revolution of 1917 my grandmother wore a wig. I saw a wig in her house, but when I remember her she wore a shawl. When I was 9-10 years old my grandmother often visited us. She asked us to turn off the radio and asked if we had a minute. She told us stories about Jews and Biblical stories. When her daughters got married she lived alone in her house. Her daughters visited her every day or several times during a day. Sometimes they managed to find a tenant for her just to keep her company. My grandmother lived in the smallest room in the house which only had a bed and a sideboard in it. There was a bottle of eau-de-Cologne and a glass of water on the sideboard. There was also a settee near the bed. The room had a small window almost on the ground level facing the neighbor's yard. The ceiling was so low that we often hit it with our heads. My grandmother Etl followed the kashrut and celebrated Shabbat till her last day. I asked my Russian friends to come start a fire in her stove on Saturday, because she didn't allow us to do it. My grandmother used the hallway during Succoth. . We removed the tiled roof over the hallway before the holiday to make an impression of a succah and grandmother celebrated the holiday in her succah.

My grandmother lived according to the motto "Tomorrow is another day". After my grandfather died she continued in the store selling cereals, sugar, flour, etc. When one of us replaced her in the store she asked us to stay away from the candy, because it was too expensive for her to give us candy. My grandmother kept this store until the early 1920s. In the early 1930s she had an ear surgery and later another surgery on her eye. Since then she became very sickly and abandoned her business. Every evening one of us came to her to stoke her stove to heat her small room. We locked her house from the outside and in the morning one of her daughters brought her something to eat. I often saw her sleeping in her bed. In the summer of 1941 when the war broke out (for the USSR) grandmother Etl couldn't walk and it was impossible to take her to evacuation. My father's sister Khona agreed to look after her. The Germans ordered all the Jews to walk to a camp and as my grandmother couldn't walk they shot her at the entrance of her house. There was nobody to bury her and she didn't have a grave.

I also remember my great grandmother on my mother's side Sluva Shneiderman. She lived in her son's family in Tulchin. Every day she came to the store of her daughter Etl, my mother's mother. My great grandmother sold candy, matches and tobacco at the market to help her daughter earn a bit more. She took her small stool and we took her goods to the market where she was sitting even on frosty days wearing gloves leaving her fingertips uncovered. She also drank boiling water to get warm. My great grandmother Sluva died in late 1920s. She was very old, about 80 years old.

My grandmother Etl and grandfather Leib had eight children: three sons and five daughters. My mother's older brother Berl was born in 1888. He was tall and handsome. He finished a commercial school. In 1910s Berl, my grandmother's sister Soibl and her husband Shmil Shiser moved to America. The Shisers stayed overseas. Before the war we received letters and parcels from them, but after the war we lost track of them. Berl returned home. He brought young apple and pear plants that we planted in my grandmother's orchard. I don't know what kind they were, but they were the most delicious fruit I ever tried. My grandmother didn't have a single tooth, but she could eat these pears, they were so juicy. Berl was an intelligent and respectable man. He helped my grandfather Leib with the accounting. He married Feiga Rubin, a girl from an respectable family in Tulchin. She finished grammar school. Their daughter Raya was born in 1917. Berl was killed by a stray shell during the civil war. There was a woman in labor in the neighboring house and Berl came out of his shelter to help her. Feiga and her daughter Raya didn't keep in touch with us. They thought we were kaptzan (beggar in Yiddish). Only when my brother and I became students a few years before the war did they begin to visit us. In the summer of 1941, on the way to evacuation Raya started to give birth and they had to get off the train on a station and they were killed by the Germans there.

My mother's second brother Volka was born in 1894. I don't know whether he had any education besides cheder. He worked with grandfather Leib. Before WWI he was recruited to the tsarist army, but his unit didn't take part in combat action. But during the civil war he was in a red partisan unit with uncle Idel. He was captured by the Petlura units (4) and they beat him with ramrods in the central square of Tulchin. The Jewish population of the town took every effort to collect enough money to pay his ransom -- and he was ransomed. Volka often went to Odessa on business at his father's request. He married Klara (Haika) Skhotskaya who came from a very religious family in Odessa before the revolution of 1917. Her father Haim Skhotskiy served in the synagogue as gabbai. They strictly followed the kashrut and celebrated holidays regardless of the fact that the authorities disapproved of religious convictions. On Friday evening when the Shabbat came in they lit candles and Klara said a blessing over them. She didn't cook on Saturday. The family ate the food cooked a day before. I came to enter an Institute in Odessa in 1938. Volka worked as shipment forwarder since his marriage. He was a very sickly person. He had a son (Lysik) and a daughter (Manya). They studied at the Jewish school and later they graduated from university. After the war Lysik worked as director of a flour-grinding mill in Voronezh. He lives in Israel now. Manya and her family live in America. Volka died at the beginning of 1970.

My mother was the eldest of all sisters. My mother's sister Molka was born in 1896. She was a real beauty and sang in the Leontovich choir (5). In 1922 her brother Volka asked her to come to Odessa to help his wife with their son. Soon she married Abram Rozenberg, a tailor in Odessa. Abram and Molka had two sons. They both graduated from university. Molka and her older son Dodik came to our grandmother Etl in Tulchin almost every summer. Molka died in 1993. Abram died few years before her

My mother's second sister Rachel was born in 1898. She lived with my grandmother Etl in an old

house. Rachel was constantly involved in repairs in the house. She was the director of the Ukrainian library in the town. She married Gabriel Kolotinskiy who came to our town from Tomashpol to work in the bank. They had two children. Rachel and her husband bought a house in a good neighborhood in Tulchin. They evacuated to Dnepropetrovsk. Gabriel worked at the excavation of trenches and perished during an air raid. He was buried in a common grave along with other deceased. Rachel and her children went on to Frunze. After the war Rachel and her children moved to Odessa. Her son Yan perished of an electrocution. Her daughter Sopha graduated from the Construction Institute and married Isaac Klauzner. They had two sons. The family moved to Australia in the 1980s with Aunt Rachel. Aunt Rachel died in Sidney in 1996. My mother's third sister Myndia was born in 1900. She married Mendel Vexler. He was a party official. He took part in the revolution of 1917. He was always afraid that our family would spoil his reputation and didn't allow Myndia to communicate with us. Mendel got a job in Vinnitsa and Myndia moved there with him. They had a daughter. Mendel died of a heart attack. Myndia finished a course in typing and worked in the NKVD (6) office. She worked in Lvov before the war. At the beginning of the war her family evacuated to Tashkent (3000 km from Odessa). In 1945 she came back to Odessa with her daughter. They lived with us for five years. Aunt Myndia died in 1986 and her daughter died shortly afterwards. They were buried in the town of Nikolaev (150 km from Odessa). Myndia's grandchildren and great grandchildren live in Israel.

My mother's youngest brother Efim (Fima) was born in 1903. He was the only one of this generation of the family to get a higher education. He finished a polytechnic in Bratslav and graduated from the Odessa Construction Institute. Upon graduation he became a lecturer there. He married a Jewish girl from Odessa. In May 1941 his daughter was born. In July he went to the front. His family was in evacuation during the war. In 1945 they returned to their two-room apartment at the seashore. After the war their second daughter was born. In the 1950s we used to bathe in the sea until dark with Fima and his daughters. We often discussed various subjects with Fima. We often had family celebrations on the big verandah in his house. Fima died in the middle of the 1970s. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery. His children and grandchildren live in Israel and Australia.

My mother Sosia Portnaya was born in 1890. She studied without her father's knowledge. She could read and write in Yiddish and knew Russian literature well. My mother helped her mother around the house. She went to the market with her mother. The market was held twice a week in Tulchin. Farmers from the surrounding villages brought their food products: milk, eggs, poultry and vegetables. My mother was a very reserved shopper and made good choices at the market. All the relatives always treated my mother with big respect.

My father Shoil Zhornitskiy was born in 1888. After finishing cheder (they learned Torah and Talmud in cheder and that was all) he became an apprentice for a furniture upholsterer. My father was very qualified. He restored furniture at the mansion of the counts Pototskiy and Sheremetiev. My father met my mother at his sister Pesia's wedding in 1904 when he was 16. My parents got married in 1914. They never told us whether they married for love or convenience. My relatives said that some members of the family of the counts Pototskiy where my father worked as upholsterer gave my parents bedcovers from Warsaw as a wedding gift. They lasted for many years through the revolution and war and my wife used them after the war to cover our bed. My parents settled down in the house of my father's mother Haika. They had the smallest room with earthen floor. The window was very low and it was always dark in their room. My father's sister

Khona and her daughter Fira lived in the biggest room. My father worked as an upholsterer and his brothers helped him with his work. They had a workshop and a store – two in one -- at the market and their business was so successful that they even had to hire employees. Later, when furniture was not so much in demand my father started up a soap-making business. He made soap in our kitchen. Later he organized a soap-making workshop and became its manager. They did not work on Shabbat.

My older brother Leo (Leib) was born in 1916 and Volodia (Voya) was born one and a half years later, in 1917. I was born on Yom Kippur on 10 September 1919. On this day the gang (7) of a certain Marusich, a woman that came from a noble family, burst into our town. Her family had an estate near Tulchin. All Jews hid in their cellars. My mother with a newly born baby stayed at home. She didn't want to put the others at risk in case the baby started crying. It was our good luck that Marusich was just looking for an upholsterer. Some bandits stormed into the bedroom and my mother froze with horror. Marusich grabbed me, gave me a kiss and put me back on the bed. Since then my mother always celebrated my birthday on Yom Kippur. In 1923 our miznik Boris (Berl) was born. (Editor's note: The younger son of a family is called miznik or 'little finger' in Yiddish.) My mother was very weak after she gave birth to four sons. We were always concerned about her health. She was always busy doing work about the house, washing, cleaning and cooking or altering our clothes. Volodia and Boris were helping her a lot. They fetched water from the well, cut wood, stoked stoves and did a lot more. We had a Singer sewing machine with a hand drive. At my mother's request we turned the handle to make sewing easier for her. Our father got up at 5 in the morning. He stoked the stoves, took out our night pots, made breakfast and went to work. He worked very hard and made every effort to provide for his wife and sons. He was very kind and sympathetic. He died when he was 54.

As I remember Tulchin from my childhood it was a small Jewish town. Some of the Jewish traditions were still strictly observed in our family. We spoke Yiddish. Non-kosher food was forbidden in our family, just as in the families of our relatives - there was shochet in the market, we used to go there to have our poultry killed according to the rules. Before 1927 we all went to the synagogue with our parents. I remember how matzah was made at home before Pesach. We rolled the dough out on a big table, then we made the knurling with special rollers and took the trays to a family across the street to have it baked. Our stove was not good for baking and they didn't have a big table, so we worked in cooperation with them. I remember that before Pesach the house was cleaned in some special way. My mother cooked traditional food: Gefilte fish, chicken broth and matzah pudding. My father sat at the head of the table reading the Haggadah. As a rule we invited relatives for Seder eve. The children got a sip of Pesach wine. This is about all that I can remember about the Jewish festivals of my childhood. In the late 1930s we, children, stopped taking active part in the religious celebrations. We became Komsomol members and celebrated Soviet holidays. And our parents had to say only that one must be in the main stream of life in the state.

We had very little space in our apartment and in 1924 the family got together and took a decision to build a new house. There wasn't enough money for the construction and the family decided to build an annex to the store in grandmother Etl' yard. It took the family a year and a half to build two extra rooms in the annex and turn the store into a kitchen and a hallway. It turned out a beautiful apartment. We had wonderful furniture – these pieces had remained since the time when my father and his brothers had their upholstery business. I guess it wasn't sold at the time and was

stored until we decided to use it.

In 1923 Leo went to a Jewish school. Volodia went to school with him, even though he was two years younger. In 1926 my mother's sister Rachel took me to the exam at a Ukrainian school. She was an advanced woman for her time and believed that I had to study in a Ukrainian school so that I could get a higher education. She knew people at the admission commission and managed to convince them to admit me to the school. Through the first two years I had big problems with the Ukrainian language, as I had only spoken Yiddish before. I had to spend two years in the 2nd form, but it was for my benefit. My teacher Olga Petrovna Utkina, a great pedagogue and a nice person, helped me to become one of the most successful pupils in my class. Boris studied in the Ukrainian school with me. He was very smart and had the highest grades at school. We were all good at studying. Our schoolmates used to get together at our home. We studied together, played or had discussions. Our neighbors said that our parents were very special. They didn't mind our getting together. At one time when my father had a good income we had a housemaid who used to grumble that she was only wasting her energy trying to keep the floors clean. We were all good at swimming. We used to cross the pond in Tulchin from one bank to the other and back. We played football, skied and skated. We were also very fond of chess. We hardly ever had any arguments. My brothers were always ready to share everything with one another.

The years of famine 1932-1933 (8) were very hard, but we all survived. My father's soap was not in demand during the years of famine. There was a pit at the location of my father's soap-making shop where dead horses were buried – two cavalry regiments were lodging in Tulchin. The horses were buried during the day and at night the same workers dug them out to take their meat home. Our mother used to boil this meat for a long time after boiling she kept it on the fire until it almost turned into embers. We didn't go to bed until late on such days waiting for this meal to be ready. Our mother also boiled potato peels that we got from our neighbors or relatives. Boris and I got a meal at school: a bowl of skilly and a slice of so-called bread. Our teacher watched us until we finished this piece of bread so that we didn't take it home to our parents. Leo worked as a cinema operator after finishing lower secondary school (7 years). Volodia became an apprentice for a typesetter in a printing house after finishing lower secondary school. They received a ration card for 800 grams of bread as workers. We were dependants and only received 200 grams. Our parents were so weak that they could hardly stand on their feet. On some days we had no bread at all. Sometimes uncle Idel or uncle Gabriel helped us. Every now and then officers from cavalry units ordered my father to upholster some furniture and paid him with flour or bran. It was a feast for us. Our mother mixed the potato peels with bran, added some flour and made delicious pancakes. Once my father brought home some soybeans that he got from an officer. We had never tried them before, but after our mother kept them over the fire until we could eat it we got fed for the first time in a long while. One of our relatives was the director of a recreation center – after the Revolution the palaces of rich men turned into such institution - in Antopol village near Tulchin. They asked us to make new cases for the mattresses and my father took me to assist him. We had meals at the canteen for the employees. Boris was too young to work and our parents paid for his meals in this center. There was a Torgsin store (9) in Tulchin during the period of famine. My mother and I took our silver cups there and got some millet, flour and sugar in exchange. My mother was hoping for more and took me to help her carry the bags home, but, alas, my assistance was not necessary.

On 2 May 1932 the first Soviet film, "A pass to life", was shown in our town. A few years before this event the town municipal building, a communist party school and a cinema theater were built in

our town. Our father draped the walls in the cinema theater with sound absorbing fabric. Our older brother Leo also worked in this cinema theater and we often came to watch films sitting in his operator's cabin.

1935-1936 also was a difficult period. The NKVD office demanded gold from people. Our father was also summoned to go there. He was tortured there so hard that he knew he wouldn't survive. He requested permission to see his wife. When our mother came to see him he asked her to get some money and buy golden coins. He said he would die if she didn't. Our mother did as she was told, notified our father where she hid them in our home. Some NKVD officers came to search our home and "found" the coins. They released our father. My neighbor Gorenshtein was arrested in 1937 (10). We were students of the 9th form and he brought a book of Lenin to school where Lenin wrote that Stalin should not be given state power. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. In this same year a formerly noble family was deported from Tulchin. Their son Volodia was my classmate. He was a very educated and intelligent boy. They were exiled to Siberia. Volodia's mother came to us to ask my mother to let Volodia live with us until he finished school. My mother gave her consent and Volodia stayed with our family. After finishing school Volodia entered an Institute, but when the Great Patriotic War began he went to the front and perished in 1943.

Some time before the war my father went to work in the meat factory. He worked in the fat treatment workshop where they melted fat and loaded it into barrels that were transported to Kharkov for margarine production. My father left to work early in the morning. He started a fire in the stove, loaded a big bowl with fat, melted it and poured it into wooden barrels with a scoop. At the end of the day he had to clean the bowl and load the wood to get it dry for the following day. My father was working alone and we had to take his lunch to work. Our mother cooked his lunch, packed it into a white pillowcase and one of us had to walk 3 km to the factory to deliver the food. In 1937 Leo was recruited to the army. He was sent to the Far East where the Japanese army attacked the USSR in 1939 (11). Leo's unit was not far from military operations sites and our parents were very concerned about him. Leo brought a photo camera from the Far East. He also participated in the Finnish war (12). Fortunately, it wasn't long and Leo returned home in the winter of 1940. In the winter of 1941 he married Rachel, a student from Bratslav. They were living with us. Volodia worked in the printing house and studied in a trade school for workers. He finished it when he turned 17. In 1937 he entered the Faculty of Chemistry of the Dnepropetrovsk University. In the summer of 1939 a Russian secondary school was opened in our town and Boris went to the 9th form there. Boris attended an aviation design club at the district technical center for schoolchildren. He was also secretary of the Komsomol organization in his school and a member of the Komsomol district committee. Boris was awarded a tour to Moscow for his Komsomol activities. He told us lots of stories about what he saw in Moscow. He also managed to bring presents and a little bit of millet cereal. Boris finished school in 1941.

I finished school in 1938. I didn't have any preferences as for my future profession. Some of my classmates decided to continue their studies in Odessa. Three of us: Kalmen Kreitchman, Kolia Sherban and I entered the Institute of Sea Transport Engineers in Odessa. We lived in a dormitory. Our parents were very happy for their children. I received a stipend and sometimes received food parcels from home. I shared this food with my roommates. I was often hungry and on weekends went to see my mother's sister Molka who lived in Odessa. When I could not manage to go to see her, aunt Molka came to my hostel on weekends to bring me some food and take care of my laundry.

On 22 June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. My brothers and I went to the front on the first days of the war. We didn't have any information about our parents or each other for a few months. My mother told me after the war how they, together with her sister Zlota and Zlota's husband Idl with her daughter Donia, Leo's wife Rachel and some of their neighbors were leaving Tulchin on horse-driven carts. They stayed in the open air overnight and ate whatever they could get. They exchanged clothes for bread and dug up potatoes in the fields or found pumpkins or beetroots. The German planes targeted every cart or person and there were dead bodies and overturned carts scattered around. They were facing death many times on their way to escape. My uncle had a casserole where he kept embers and when they stopped he made a fire to cook food. They got to Dnepropetrovsk (500 km from Odessa) where they boarded an open railroad platform. The trip was long. They had no money or food on the way. They stayed in Budyonnovsk, Stavropol region, for some time, but as the Germans were approaching my family moved on in the summer of 1942. They reached Baku and crossed the Caspian Sea to get to Turkmenistan. They stayed on a collective farm where they were involved in cotton harvesting. At the beginning of November 1942 they reached Frunze (3500 km from Odessa), the capital of Kirghizia. My father fell very ill there. He had stomach hemorrhage and died in October 1943. He was buried in Frunze.

Leo perished in the first months of the war in 1941. Volodia saw Leo marching with an artillery unit in Dnepropetrovsk. He marched with him to the gate of his military unit and this was the last time when Leo was seen. We don't know where he perished. Leo's wife Rachel lived with our mother until the end of the war hoping that Leo would return.

Boris studied at a military college. After finishing it he worked at the military factory that manufactured shells in a village in the vicinity of Ufa (Bashkiria). He forwarded shell shipments to the front. When our father died in evacuation my mother went to Boris and lived with him until the end of the war. After the war Boris went to study at the Kharkov Military Academy and our mother moved to us in Odessa. Upon graduation from the Academy Boris was assigned to work in Serpukhov near Moscow. He worked in a design office. He got married and had two sons: Alexandr and Volodia. In the 1990s he moved to the USA with his family. They live in New York.

On the second day of the war, on 23 June 1941, I was assigned to a fighting battalion (13) of Voroshylov district. We patrolled the town, excavated trenches and chased after spies. On the first days of the war the Germans bombed our institute and the dormitory. At the end of July Kalmen Kreitchman, Kolia Scherban and I entered the artillery college in Odessa. On the last days of July the college was evacuated to the Urals. We lived in barracks. It was cold there and we didn't have enough food. We studied artillery, topography and logistics. I was a good student, but I was homesick and missed my family. In February 1942 we moved to Novosibirsk where we continued our studies. At the end of July 1942 we went to the front. I started my military career as a platoon leader and was promoted to commander of battalion. On 24 August 1944 I was severely wounded in the shank of my right leg and my right hand near Belostok in Poland. I was bleeding profusely, fainting and regaining consciousness. I was lying there until dark. I was unconscious and our soldiers thought I was dead. One of them was attracted by my box calf boots. When some soldiers began to pull my boots off my leg I groaned. The soldiers called the nurses and I was taken to a house. I had stayed at the battlefield for over six hours. I was thirsty and was allowed to drink as much as I wanted, because the nurses thought I was in agony. Later the doctors in the hospital in Belostok told me that this saved my life. The hospital was overcrowded and many patients were lying on the floor. I was there several days when doctor Sarah Markovna Bluvshstein came to me asking "Are you an officer?" I told her my rank and position and asked her to send a message

about me to my regiment. I was moved to an officer's ward. On 1 September the chief surgeon examined me and announced that I had gas gangrene. He explained that I needed to have my leg amputated to my knee, in an hour and if I hesitated it might become too late. I had a high fever and didn't care about anything. I kept silent. The chief surgeon said that it was useless to ask for my consent and did what he had to do. I regained consciousness in a ward. Sarah Markovna was sitting beside me telling me that it wasn't going to be easy to live with my leg amputated, but that I could still lead a good life. She looked after me for a month and a half that I was in this hospital. I am so grateful to her and her husband, the chief surgeon.

Later I was transferred to a hospital in Tbilissi. My wounds were healing very slowly and I stayed in Tbilissi for a long time. I was young and soon began to look at girls. I liked Julia Kintsurashvili, the senior nurse. She was tall and beautiful. She was very kind and caring. I began to pay more attention to her. I was prepared for getting an amputation leg and was staying in a separate ward. Julia was looking after me there. On Victory Day I was in hospital. There was so much joy and happiness everywhere. When all sutures were removed from my leg I proposed to Julia. She accepted it and said that I had to finish my studies at the institute and that we would live on her salary and my pension meanwhile. Julia's father said: "A Jew, and without a leg! On the other hand, all of my friends are Jewish and besides, he lost his leg at the front." I was released from hospital on 29 June 1945. On the same day the doctors and nurses arranged a wedding party for us in the apartment of Julia's best friend. Boris and my mother invited us to stay some time with them. After a few days we arrived in Uman, a small town 30 km from Ufa, where Boris and my mother lived. We spent 3 wonderful weeks in Bashkiria. My mother liked Julia from the first minute.

In August we came to Odessa. We were trying to get an apartment. The military commandant of the town helped us to get a two-room apartment. My aunt Myndia and Lena moved in with us. We didn't have any furniture in this apartment and Abram and Molka gave us a bed and a table. Uncle Idi made a string mattress for us.

I went to the dean's office to get a permission to continue my studies. The dean advised me to give up this idea, as I wouldn't be able to find a job at the fleet. I went to see the rector. He put his signature on my request and said that I would have enough work at the fleet if I had a head on my shoulders. He called the dean's office and insisted on my readmission to the Institute. I am so grateful to him for what he did for me. I continued my studies as a fourth year student. There were 6 other students demobilized from the front. One of them, Pavel Medvedev, became my close friend and we were friends until he died in the late 1980s. He was a senior student and I was the party organizer of our course. I became a member of the Party at the front. In 1947 I had sailing training. Our boat cruised to Bulgaria, Rumania, Turkey, Singapore and Malay.

Our older daughter Emma was born in 1946. I received a stipend and a pension for my invalidity. We were poor, but we managed to make ends meet. My brothers Volodia and Boris and my cousin Fira were helping us at this period. Volodia and his wife visited us in Odessa several times. My mother moved in with us in Odessa after her granddaughter was born. My mother's brothers and sisters also lived in Odessa. My mother had heart problems and walking was difficult for her, so our relatives visited us on the big Jewish holidays. On the holidays my mother went to the only synagogue in the city, at Peresyp (14). My wife escorted her there and made sure that she was all right.. Mother lit candles for Shabbat and followed the kashrut. There was a shochet at the New Market after the war. The Jewish spirit was alive in my house until mother's death. In 1950 my mother went to visit her sister Zlota in Tulchin and died of heart attack. She was buried in an old cemetery in Tulchin where all her relatives had been buried. After my mother died all family

celebration were arranged in the house of Abram and Molka. They supported our family during and after the war. I never saw Abram upset. I will always remember how he used to say “Molkaly, it’ll be O’K. Everything will be fine”. We had traditional Jewish food, sang Jewish songs and partied until late at our family celebrations. Uncle Yosl and Pesia from Dnepropetrovsk and Idl and Zlota from Tulchin often came to our celebrations. We had very strong family ties.

I graduated from the Institute in the summer of 1947. I got a job assignment in the newly established design office of the Black Sea Fleet in Lastochkin Street. I worked there for 40 years. I was awarded the badge of Honorable Employee of the Ministry of Navy of the USSR and Honorable Employee of the Black Sea Fleet, and I am the author of several inventions. I was a designer, senior engineer and leading designer. Since the 1970s I worked with fire-fighting systems. I took part in a number of conferences in Leningrad, went to experimental fires to develop standards for fire fighting on land and on sea. I never had any problems or disadvantages because of my Jewish nationality.

I remember 1948 when Israel was established. Our people suffered a lot during the Holocaust and this was an opportunity for them to get a home. However, moving there never occurred to me. In 1967 I followed the events of the Six-Day War. There were quite a few Jews in our design office and we were very happy about the victory and congratulated one another.

1952 was the period of the “Doctors’ Case” (15), it was a time of fear. We were as quiet as mice. There were rumors that Jews were going to be deported to Birobidjan (16). When Stalin died the Doctors’ Plot was closed and the rumpus vanished. When Stalin died we felt very unhappy and my wife cried. We had no idea how we were going to live without Stalin.

Our second daughter Svetlana was born in 1953. When our children grew older Julia went to work at the polyclinic not far from our house. Our girls received a good education. Both of them finished music school. I raised my daughters with Jewish identity and they were registered in their ID cards as Jews. Fortunately they had no problems because of their Jewish origin. Emma graduated from the Hydrotechnical Faculty of Navy Engineers and Svetlana graduated from the Cryogenic Faculty of the Refrigeration Institute.

Emma married Slava Braverman - a grandson of my mother’s sister Zlota - in 1973. They have two sons: Dima and Igor. They live in America. Svetlana married her fellow student Yura Golovchenko in 1976. They have a daughter Natasha. She lives in Odessa. She married her fellow student. They have their own business and they are successful.

Our daughters live nearby. Emma lives in our former apartment and Svetlana lives in the apartment that I received in 1976. Our family received two apartments at that time. My wife and I live in one of them. Julia hardly ever goes out, but our daughters come to see us every day. We follow events in the world and in Israel, in particular. I read a lot about the history of my people. I bump into familiar stories that my grandmother Etl used to tell me. I know that Jewish life has revived in our town lately. There are Jewish associations in our town and there are two synagogues. I am very glad that the synagogue in Richelieu Street has been returned to the Jews. I receive the Jewish newspapers “Or Sameach” and “Shomrei Shabos” that publish all news about Jewish life in Odessa. Recently I began to receive assistance from the Jewish charity center “Gemilot Hesed”.

Glossary

1. GPU: State Political Department, the state security agency of the USSR, that is, the punitive body of Soviet authorities.
2. Komsomol: communist youth organization created by the Communist Party to make sure that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.
3. Great Patriotic War: On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.
3. NEP: New Economic Policy, the economic policy of the Soviet Union in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism when private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by wars and revolution. It was launched by Lenin in 1921 and was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.
4. Simon Petliura (1879-1926): Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Working Party; In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris as a revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.
5. N. D. Leontovich (1877 – 1921): Ukrainian composer, conductor of choir, organizer and director of several Ukrainian folk choirs, founder of the famous Ukrainian national choir.
6. NKVD: People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over the functions of the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.
7. Gangs: During the civil war in 1918-1920 there were all kinds of gangs in Ukraine. They used political slogans to cover their criminal deeds. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic.
8. Famine in Ukraine: In 1920 a forced famine was introduced in Ukraine that caused the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress the protesting peasants that did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful forced famine in 1930-1934 in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the farmers. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that did not want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.
9. Torgsin stores: These stores were created in the 1920s to support trade with foreigners. One could buy good quality food products and clothing in exchange for gold and antiquities in such shops.
10. Arrested in the end of 1937: In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.
11. The Japanese army attacked the USSR in 1939: in the summer of 1939 on the river Halkhin-Gol the Japanese army attacked the territory of the Mongol Republic that had a union agreement with USSR; The Japanese were defeated by the Soviet-Mongol joint army.
12. Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40): the Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to take hold of the Karelian Isthmus. The red Army was stopped at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from among its members. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, according to which the Karelian Isthmus and some other areas became part of the Soviet Union.
13. Fighting battalion: people's volunteer corps during the Great Patriotic War; its soldiers patrolled towns, excavated trenches and watched buildings during bombings at night. Students often

volunteered to participate in these fighting battalions.

14. Peresyp: An industrial neighborhood in the outskirts of Odessa

15. Doctors' Plot: The so-called Doctors' Plot was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with the murder of outstanding Bolsheviks. The "Plot" was started in 1952, but was never finished because Stalin died in 1953.

16.

Birobidjan: In the 1930s Stalin's government established a Jewish autonomous region in Birobidjan, in a desert with terrible climate in the Far East of Russia. The conditions were very inhospitable there. There was no water, power supply, houses or transportation. The Soviet government hoped that educated people would populate this area and make it a civilized republic. People were in no hurry to leave their jobs and homes and the comforts of living in a town and move to the middle of nowhere. The Soviet government set the term of forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidjan in the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled.