

# Michael Kotliar



A picture of me, taken in Chernovtsy in 2000. When Ukraine gained independence in 1991 Jewish life revived. There are Jewish organizations, and Jewish culture has returned to our life. I began to take an interest in our roots in the 1980s after my parents died. I recalled prayers, holidays and traditions. At that period I wasn't interested in any party activities any longer. In the 1980s there were many TV programs and publications about various aspects of life in the country. We also got an opportunity to read about life in developed Western countries. We realized how much misery there was in our country. I knew that in a country, where the life of a human being belonged to the state and where industries and land didn't have owners to take care of them, there could be no order or improvements. I got disappointed in communist ideals. From the beginning of perestroika I was dreaming about a museum of Jewish history. I saw how people were throwing away their photographs, books and documents before leaving for Israel and other countries. I collected all I could find, sorted things out and kept them. As soon as the Association of Jewish Culture was founded I offered to establish a museum about the Jewish history of Chernovtsy. I studied museum business and transferred my whole collection to the museum. We also asked people to give their

historical belongings to the museum. Within half a year we finished and displayed our collection. There was an opening ceremony where I was referred to as the author of the idea and founder of the museum. We tell people about Jewish life in Chernovtsy before 1940, how many synagogues were in town, Jewish everyday life, their traditions and religion and about the peaceful coexistence with people of other nationalities. We have ancient Torah scrolls , prayer books , tallits, chanukkiyahs, other Jewish ritual accessories and old family pictures that were miraculously saved during the Great Patriotic War. What's most important to me is that there is a museum and that I can continue my work. I am also fond of tourism. I work as a part-time guide at a tourist agency. I do guided tours for foreigners. Chernovtsy is a very beautiful town. The Jewish neighborhood in the center of the town has preserved its original looks. I know every house in Chernovtsy, its history, architect and all its former owners. The museum and tourism are the two things I'll have for the rest of my life.