

Raissa Smelaya



This is a picture of me on the balcony of my apartment. The photo was taken in Chernovtsy in 2000. In 1956 my first husband Leonid Yakovenko died unexpectedly of a heart attack. In 1958 I married a Ukrainian man. My second husband's name was Petr Smely. A year later we moved to Chernovtsy. Chernovtsy is a nice town. There are beautiful old houses in the central part of the town, which have their own history. I felt at home in this town. I was very surprised to hear Jews speaking Yiddish in the streets. Jews observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. And they weren't old people, they were the same age as I. There were many Jews living in Chernovtsy. After the Great Patriotic War many Jews moved to Romania from Chernovtsy and from there they moved to Israel, but there were still many Jews left in the town. I didn't work after we moved to Chernovtsy. My children studied and my husband worked as a driver in a car pool. We spent vacations with my mother and aunt in Kiev. They were always happy to see us. My mother got along very well with them. Petr died in Chernovtsy in 1987. I live alone now. I believe life has got worse significantly after perestroika in the 1980s. If it hadn't been for perestroika the great and powerful Soviet Union wouldn't have fallen apart. Young people have nothing sacred nowadays. Lenin and Stalin were our idols and we loved our people and our country while young people now don't believe in anything, but money. Jewish life has revived in the past decade. Hesed provides great assistance to old people. I live alone and I appreciate the assistance provided by Hesed very much. I receive Jewish newspapers and attend the communication club in Hesed. This helps me to overcome my solitude. I have lunch at the canteen of the Jewish Charity Committee every day. It's not only a big support for me, but also an opportunity to communicate. I know that I will see people that have become close to me. There are 50 of us and we feel like a family. In recent years I've identified myself as a Jew thanks to Hesed. I attend lectures on Jewish history, go to performances of the Jewish drama studio in Hesed and to the communication club for elderly people, where we often watch Jewish movies or listen to life stories of outstanding Jews. It's all very interesting. Regretfully, my memory is getting worse and I can't study Hebrew any more. I've got new friends at Hesed that help me to overcome my solitude.