# Efim Pisarenko

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Chernovtsy
Ukraine
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My name is Efim Pisarenko. I was born in Gomel, Belarus, on 10th July 1937. I come from a Belarus Jewish family. Efim is my name in as it's written in my birth certificate. My real name, given to me by my father and mother is Haim-Gedalie. My father's name was E'Kusiel Pisarenko. They called him Kusha in the family. He was born in the village of Rechitsa, Gomel region, Belarus, in 1898 ????. My mother, Basia Pisarenko [nee Shulkina], was born in Gomel in 1900.

Before telling you about my family I would like to explain the origin of my last name. Sometimes people ask me why a purely Jewish family has a typical Ukrainian name. My father told me that my ancestors got this name during the reign of Peter I [Peter the Great] 1. There was a man called Aizek in a town in Southern Belarus. He could read and write in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He was the only educated man in his town. He worked as a writing clerk in the town council. In Russian the word 'write' sounds like 'pisat'. His children were called Pisaryonok, which means 'children of the writing clerk' in Russian. Later that became Pisarenko. Aizek had a big family and many children. Life in that little town was miserable, and bored and young people always wanted to have a different life. This was at the time of Empress Ekaterina Catherine II [Catherine the Great] 2. During her reign the Russian army liberated a bigger part of the Crimea - it was called Tavria at the time - from Tatars and this became the new territory of the Russian Empire. CatherineEkaterina let gave big privileges to those willing to move there and start farming. They were tax exempt for 25 years and received money from the Treasury to start their own farming business. They got as much land as they could manage to till. The climate there was favorable.

This was a big temptation for a young man from a small Belarus town, whose ancestors were trying to grow their crops on a little plot of land and led a hand-to-mouth life. One of Aizek's sons decided to move to the Crimea. He received a plot of land in Kherson. He started the family branch of Pisarenko in Kherson. I met one of the family members in the 1960s. Somebody introduced him to me and we found out that we had a similar last name. I asked about his nationality, and he said he was a Jew. And I said to him that two Jews with the last name of Pisarenko, who both lived in Ukraine, simply must have been relatives. With my mother's help we found out that he was a successor of Aizek's son. And that's how I found out that our last name goes back to the period of Catherine IIEkaterina.

Avrum Pisarenko, my grandfather on my father's side, was born in the 1850s and lived in the village of Rechitsa near Gomel. Several generations of his ancestors had lived there, too. Jews constituted about half of the population of Rechitsa. The main business of the inhabitants of Rechitsa, both Jewish and Belarus, was farming and crafts. They didn't have a lot of land, and it wasn't possible to buy someextra land because there was none left. Therefore those who couldn't provide for their families by farming took to crafts. All tailors and shoemakers in Rechitsa were

Jews. There were also tinsmiths and carpenters. They were mostly paid with food products. My grandfather liked farming and breeding cattle. He couldn't afford to buy cows, so he borrowed eight cows from a farmer to run his dairy business. The whole family was involved in work somehow, even the youngest children. My grandmother's name was Broha-Shyma. I know very little about her life before she got married. I know that she came from Belarus. She was born in 1855. After they got married my grandfather and grandmother lived in Rechitsa for the rest of their lives. They had a big family - 12 or 13 children. I knew some of them. Their children helped them with their dairy work. They milked the cows early in the morning, and then they took them to the shepherd. The girls helped my grandmother to make cottage cheese, sour cream and butter. The boys took these products to Gomel to sell them there. The family had its own customers, and the boys delivered their orders to their homes. By the way, my father delivered the products to the family of a carpenter called Shulkin. This carpenter had a beautiful daughter, Basia, my future mother. The family had a lot of work to do. In the evening they made products for the following morning. They made preparations to make cottage cheese and sour cream in the morning. This was hard work, but it gave them the opportunity to provide for themselves. They weren't rich, but they weren't poor either. My grandmother tenderly called her cows 'food providers'. My grandparents only bought clothes for the older children. The younger ones wore what the older ones had grown out of. However, once a year, on Pesach, all the children got new clothes.

My father's parents had a wooden house with three rooms. There weren't many furnishings in the house, but they had everything they needed. One room was for the parents, another one for the sons and the third one for the daughters. They also had an annex with a cellar where they stored dairy products. There was a small orchard with a few fruit trees and a shed where they kept cows. My grandfather had inherited this house from his parents.

People in Rechitsa got along well with each other. Belarus and Jews were good neighbors. There were no nationality conflicts between them. There was a synagogue and a Christian church in the main square of the town. My father told me that their Belarus neighbors treated them to Easter bread and painted eggs, and when my grandmother made most delicious strudels with raisins, jam and nuts and stuffed fish, she used to take some to their neighbors. My grandparents' family was religious. They strictly observed all Jewish traditions. On Fridays my grandmother lit candles and the family got together at the table, which was covered with a white table clothtablecloth. In the afternoon she made chicken broth in ceramic pots and cholent. Cholent was a dish made from beans, potatoes and meat. The pots were left in the oven so that the food stayed warm until Saturday, when it wasn't allowed to work to do. Our Belarus neighbor came to light the candles on Saturday. The family strictly observed the kashrut. My grandmother had different dishes for milk and meat products, and the children learned about this tradition from an early age.

My grandparents went to the synagogue every week. My grandfather wore a kippah at home and a hat when he went out. My grandmother wore a shawl and long black gowns in all seasons. My father said that there was a relic in the family - a big bronze chanukkiyah. On Chanukkah they lit one candle in it everyper day. [Editor's note: In fact at Channukah, one candle is lit on the first day, two on the second and so on until 8 candles are lit on the last day of the holiday.] He also remembered Chanukkah because the children received some money, some Chanukkah gelt, on that holiday. The children hardly ever had any pocket money and therefore always looked forward to Chanukkah.

My father had the greatest memories of Pesach. The family prepared for it in advance. My grandmother chose some geese at her neighbor's farm, and he fed them specifically for her. Before Pesach tThey took the geese to the shocihet, and my grandmother melted the fat in a big pot. The house had to be cleaned to be all clean and all the children took part in the process. They swept and burned all garbage, even breadcrumbs, and brought special Pesach dishes down from the attic. There was a bakery, managed run by the synagogue, and my grandparents brought matzah from there. The family was big and they usually bought a few bags of it. Then my grandmother and her daughters began to cook stuffed fish, chicken broth with dumplings made from matzah and stuffed chicken necks. Papa didn't remember all the dishes, but there was a lot of food different from their everyday meals. The boys made flour from matzah and Granny made sponge cakes from it. She tried to make this holiday an event to be remembered.

The boys studied in cheder and the girls were educated at home. They had private teachers come to their home to teach them how to write and read as well as foreign languages and good manners.

However, life in Rechitsa wasn't always quiet. Since 1910 pogroms 3 swept over Gomel and the surrounding towns and villages, including Rechitsa. They lasted until after the Revolution of 1917 4. The gangs swooped down the town, robbed and killed people and disappeared. One of my father's older brothers organized a Jewish self-defense movement 5 in 1912. It included a group of young Jewish men that were protecting people in Rechitsa from pogroms. As far as I know, nobody from my parents' families suffered from these pogroms. But it had their affected on their further life in a way. I remember an incident from the 1960s. My mother's neighbors renovated their house and rolled an empty barrel down the stairs past her apartment. It made such a noise that my mother screamed, 'Pogrom!'. The fear of pogroms was somehow in their blood forever.

The self-defense group chased the gangs away from the village several time. At that time, in 1912, my father's brother was 18. Later he had to run away from the town to avoid revenge from the bandits. In the 1920s he left for America and changed his name to Fisher. He lived in Philadelphia and then in Baltimore. In the 1930s we received a letter from him via the Red Cross. At that time it was dangerous to receive a letter from relatives abroad 6. My family put the letter away and then it got lost somehow. We've had no contact with my uncle ever since. Two of my father's brothers died from spotted fever in the 1920s, during the Civil War 7. I don't know their names or the ones of the other sisters and brothers. I only knew one uncle on personally: Juda Pisarenko, born in 1894. He lived in Voronezh before the war and had three sons. His sons became doctors. In the early 1970s my uncle's family emigrated to the USA, and I've had no information about them ever since.

My grandfather Avrum died in 1915, and my grandmother Broha-Shyma died a year later.

I will tell you about my mother's family. HerMy mother came from athe family with many children just like my father. Her father, Moishe Shulkin, was born in Gomel in 1879. My grandfather was a very good cabinet maker. He was married twice. His first wife was Broha Shulkina, my mother's mother. Grandmother Broha was born in Gomel in 1879. I don't know her nee maiden name or what kind of family she came from. My grandparents had two daughters. My mother's younger sister, Golda [Shulkina], was born in 1902. My grandmother Broha died in an accident in 1905. A year later my grandfather got married for the second time. I remember my mother's stepmother, Hena. She was a very nice woman. My grandfather and her had six children: five daughters and a son.

I wouldn't say that my mother's father and stepmother were extremely religious. They led a secular life. My grandfather took an active part in the underground movement and was a member of the Social-Democratic Party. He had an underground publishing house in the basement of his house where they published a Bolshevik newspaper for a long time. I read that in a party history textbook somewhere. He published a newspaper and also continued making furniture. My grandmother was responsible for the housekeeping. I'm not aware of any persecution of my grandfather in regards to this publishing house. He was a convinced revolutionary and communist. He might have followed into the footsteps of many revolutionaries during the period of the Stalinist repression [the so-called Great Terror] 8, but he died before, in 1933. My grandfather was a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, but that didn't mean that the family didn't remember that they were Jews. During Chanukkah they lit the chanukkiyah at home; they had a mezuzah on the door and my grandmother lit candles on Saturdays.

My grandparents didn't go to the synagogue. They observed Jewish traditions in the family and celebrated holidays. The children were given Jewish names. Boys were circumcised. They spoke Yiddish in the family. As far as I remember my grandmother Hena didn't follow the kashrut. She died in March 1941.

My grandparents' children helped my grandmother with the housework. The older children looked after the younger ones. The girls helped with the laundry and cleaning and the boys helped my grandfather with the carpentry. So everybody was busy doing something. The children didn't get any education. My mother learned how to read and write after the Revolution.

My mother's sister Golda lived a long life. She was single and didn't have any education. She was a laborer at a factory. She lived in Moscow from 1922 until her death in 1983.

My grandfather had a daughter with his second wife. Her name was Musia. She was born in 1907, lived in Gomel and was married. Her husband's last name was Kantorov. They had three sons. In the 1970s Musia and her family emigrated to the USA. She died there in the 1980s.

Sonia, the next sister, was born in 1909. I knew her when she was already an elderly and very sickly woman. She had three sons. Her husband perished at the front in the 1940s. Her family lived in Gomel. Aunt Sonia worked as a cleaning woman. Her children emigrated to the USA in the early 1970s. Aunt Sonia moved in with us in Chernovtsy. She died here in the 1970s. Her sons Marat, Israil and Ruvik live in Brooklyn, New York.

Rosa was born in 1910. She was married and her name after her husband was Kapustina. They lived in Moldavia and had five children. Her husband perished at the front. After the war Aunt Rosa and her children moved to Chernovtsy. She was a blood donor and was paid for it. She raised her children with that money. When she grew older, she generated so much blood that she had to donor it otherwise she fell ill. She died in 1960 and is buried in Chernovtsy. Her older daughter still lives in Chernovtsy, and her other children live in Toronto, Canada.

Klara was born in 1912. She got married, lived in Gomel and worked as a seamstress at a factory. She had a son. Her husband died in the 1970s, and Klara and her son emigrated to America. She died there in the 1980s.

My grandparents' only son, Yuzik, was born in 1913. He emigrated to America in the late 1920s. He got married there and had two sons. He didn't keep in touch with our family.

The youngest girl, Haya-Rohl, was born in 1914. Aunt Haya lived with us until she got married to Isaak Shapiro. He was a very nice man. He was a locomotive operator. He was an orphan and grew up in a children's home. They had three daughters. In June 1941 Haya was pregnant again. We knew that she had her fourth child on 22nd June 1941 [the beginning of the Great Patriotic War] 9, when Germans were already in Gomel. Isaak happened to be on a business trip that day. When he returned there were Germans in Gomel. He couldn't get home. He managed to obtain a certificate stating that he was Ivan Petrovich Pisarenko, a Russian. He lived in the underground and blasted two German trains. Once, when he was in the sauna, his companion figured out that he was a Jew. Isaak ran away and joined the partisans. We have articles from newspapers about Isaak's heroic deeds during the war. After the war he was trying to find his family and found out that they had all been taken to Treblinka or Auschwitz and exterminated. He was alone and came to us looking for a shelter. He married my older sister, Broha. They lived together for 54 years. They have a son and a daughter.

My parents got married in 1917. They had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah. Their parents insisted on having a religious ceremony. In 1917 this was still a tradition. I don't think my parents could have imagined at that time that it could ever be different. That only happened later when religious traditions were persecuted [during the struggle against religion] 10. My father joined a Red revolutionary unit during the Civil War almost immediately after he got married. He returned in 1919. My older sister, Broha, was born on 31st December 1921. She got her name after our grandmother. Misha was born at the beginning of 1924, Lisa in 1926, Abram in 1928 and I in 1937. My younger sister, Zhenia, followed in 1939.

My father got a job of as a plumber, and later, as a locksmith at the Gomel Plant of Agricultural Equipment. There were four children in the family at that time, but they didn't have a place to live. There were other families without homes, too. They got together, contributed the money that they had, the plant added some, too, and they built a spacious house for four families. Our family got one of the four apartments in this house. My mother was a housewife. She got a cow and chickens and worked in her small vegetable garden. This vegetable garden and the cow rescued our family from starving to death in 1932-33 [during the famine in Ukraine] 11. Mama took her younger sister, Haya, to live with us during those terrible years. We survived, but Grandfatherny Moishe starved to death in 1933. He gave everything he earned in those years to his grandchildren. Grandmother Hena died in March 1941.

Our family suffered at the beginning of 1932. My father was a member of the Communist Party. One day somebody whispered to him to stay away from home, because the militia might come to arrest him. He came home in the afternoon to tell Mama that he might not be home that night. He also told her to ask no questions. He left, presumably for Moscow. A day or two later some people came to our house asking about my father. Mama told them she didn't know where he was. In Moscow my father didn't mention anything to anybody. He went to work as a plumber. He made roofs. He sent Mama money via one of his relatives. Four years went by and the situation calmed down. My father returned home. He was no longer a member of the Party. He found a job. He didn't suffer during the arrests of 1937 or in the following years [during the so-called Great Terror]. I, Haim-Gedalie, was born in 1937 and my sister Gelda, Zhenia, was born in 1939.

We talked Yiddish in the family. We also knew Russian, of course, but we preferred to communicate in Yiddish. We observed Jewish traditions, observed Sabbath and celebrated Jewish holidays. I remember my mother lighting candles on Sabbath. I liked it a lot. I also recall fancy dishes we had on some high holiday - it must have been Pesach - and a lot of delicious food. I can't remember what kind of food it was, but it was very delicious. We didn't go to the synagogue, though.

From what my parents told me there was no anti-Semitism then. No one took any interest in other people's nationality. I can't remember these happy days because I was too young. In 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. My father saw Germans during World War I and thought they were civilized people. My mother was afraid of Germans nonetheless. She was sure that if there was a war they would castrate Jewish boys. My father laughed at her. Nobody considered the possibility of a war with Germany, even after Germans occupied Poland. Nobody had any premonition of the war. Life was beginning to improve. In 1941 Misha and Broha finished the 10th grade at a Jewish school and were thinking of continuing their studies. My father had only studied at cheder and was very happy that his children would get a higher education. Everybody had great expectations of the future.

I was a very vivid boy and interfered with Misha and Broha when they prepared for their exams. In May 1941 Mama sent me and my older sister Lisa to Aunt Musia Musia in Moldavia. Aunt Musia. Her husband and daughter lived in the town of Bershad. This was a Jewish town. There wasA at least 80% of the Jewish population was Jewish. I was three and a half years old, Lisa was 16. She was a very beautiful girl.

On 22nd June 1941 the war began. I didn't understand what it meant. Aunt Rosa's husband was summoned to the army. Soon Bershad was occupied by Germans. They sent all Jews of the town to a the camp. Adults went on foot and children on carts. I had never seen horses before and was impressed. The camp was a part of the town fenced with barbed wire. It was guarded by Romanian gendarmes. There was one gate and the guards standing there were armed with automatic guns. Police dogs were running along the fence. My sister, me, Aunt Rosa and her daughter shared a room with a few other families. We slept on the floor cuddling each other.

Lisa worked at the butter creamery. A Romanian guard fell in love with her and allowed her to take some pressed wastes with her. This was our food. In summer we collected the seeds of some plant, I don't know which one. We also ate goose-foot and hawthorn. It caused a headache, but it didn't stop us from eating it. Every now and then there were raids in the streets, and the captives were either shot or sent to death camps. The Romanian guard told Lisa beforehand on what street there was going to be another raid. He saved our lives. Once he gave me a toffee. My mouth still waters when I recall how good it tasted.

There were many children in the camp. Policemen used to make the rounds of the houses and shoot the children they found. Adults sent us, children, to the nearby ravine to hide - this was within the ghetto area - and told us to hide in the bushes if we saw somebody wearing a black uniform. We played there and it was our escape spot. There was a small wheat field within the barbed wire fencing where we looked for spikelets. There were sugar beets on another field. We dug themit out and ate them. But the best thing was a carrot that we found once.

We weren't allowed to cross the barbed wire fence. Such was our life. In the evening we came back home. I remember one day when we stayed in the house. It must have been in winter or maybe the

weather was just really nasty, something like that. Drunken soldiers and policemen were shooting through the windows. Adults told us to hide behind the oven. They [the soldiers] went to the neighboring house, grabbed Rosa, the a 14- year old girl, by her hair and pulled her out somewhere. Later she was found dead. [Editor's note: That was all Efim would tell us about the camp - he said he didn't want to repeat what he had said in his interview with the Shoah Visual History Foundation.]

In 1945 the Soviet army liberated us. We didn't know where to go. There were many people from Chernovtsy that said it was possible to find a place to live in Chernovtsy. We went there. Lisa wrote a letter to our address in Gomel. Our house in Gomel was bombed and destroyed. Our neighbor got this letter. She met aunt Musia at the market and gave her the letter. Aunt Musia wrote Mama that we were alive. Lisa wrote Mama that it was possible to find an apartment in Chernovtsy. This was in 1946 and we lived together ever since. At the beginning of the war my father was summoned to the front. Misha finished secondary school and submitted his documents to the Medical Academy in Leningrad. He went to the front instead and perished there. He was a tankman and had a platoon under his command. Almost all his classmates perished, none of the boys returned from the front. Almost all girls from the class, in which Misha and Broha studied, also perished. Some of them were nurses or radio operators on the front. The rest of them perished during the occupation.

All other members of our family - Mama, Broha, Abram and Zhenia - were in evacuation in Stary Sultanbek village, Bashkiria. My mother's sisters Rosa, Golda and Sonia and their children were there, too. Their husbands were at the front. In 1943 mMy father visited them. He was wounded in 1942. He fell ill with tuberculosis in hospital. He had only half of his lung left afterwards and was released from the army. He became an invalid. My father was a tinsmith and got a job to provide for the family. Their life in Bashkiria became a little bit easier.

In 1945 the Soviet army liberated us [from the camp]. We didn't know where to go. There were many people from Chernovtsy who said it was possible to find a place to live there. We went to Chernovtsy. Lisa wrote a letter to our parents' place in Gomel. Our house in Gomel had been bombed and destroyed. Our neighbor got the letter. She met Aunt Musia at the market and gave the letter to her. Aunt Musia wrote to Mama that we were alive. Lisa told Mama that it was possible to find an apartment in Chernovtsy.

We found an empty house in Klokuchka on the outskirts of Chernovtsy. This was in 1946. We've lived there ever since. There was only one room, a closet and a kitchen in the house, but it seemed like a palace to us. There were two plum trees in the yard and plums on the ground. I couldn't imagine anything like that in the beginning! During our whole time in the camp I had two plums and one apple, which I got from the Romanian guard and shared with my sister.

Chernovtsy was a Jewish town. People talked in Yiddish in the streets and called one another by their Jewish names. 60 percent of the population was Jewish, there were quite a few synagogues, Jewish schools and theaters. Chernovtsy was annexed to the USSR in 1939. The Jews in Chernovtsy survived the Holocaust because it was mainly a Romanian occupation zone. There was no anti-Semitism in Chernovtsy at that time. Chernovtsy had historically been a town where people of various nationalities lived.

In 1945 I went to the Ukrainian school. I studied there for two years. I remember my first teacher Nadezhda Alexandrovna. We liked her a lot. She told us about Lenin[1]. In the 1st form I became a

young Octobrist2, and wore my star badge proudly. After I finished the 2nd form separate educational system for boys and girls was introduced and boys went to school # 5. It was a Russian school for boys. In our class there were 28 Jews of 32 children. It was easier for us to talk Yiddish than Russian. Besides, half of our teachers were Jews. In the 3rd form I became a pioneer. The mother of Zoya Kosmodemianskaya, the famous partisan, said a speech calling us to bear the title of the pioneer with honor. We celebrated the Soviet holidays - the 1st of May and the 7th of November - at school We went to the parades and then came back to school for the meeting and a concert. After the parade were could have an ice-cream that was an event in itself for us considering that this was the period of lack of food. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. We were very poor. My father was severely ill with tuberculosis. We often starved. My father couldn't go to work due to his illness, and my mother had to stay at home to look after him. My father received an invalid pension, but it was a very insignificant amount of money.

We didn't forget that we were Jews. We didn't eat pork. Mama always took her chickens to the shochet to have them slaughtered. I still remember Mama's Jewish food. Papa told me about the 9th of Av and why we had to fast on Yom Kippur. He told me about Purim and read the Haggadah [at Pesach]. We only went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. From 1948 [when the campaign against 'cosmopolitans started] 12 this was almost forbidden. Mama didn't light Saturday candles, but she always tried to arrange for a festive Pesach. She saved money for a whole year for this holiday. She bought chicken and fish and tried to get some matzah. I went to get matzah with her. We couldn't do it openly in those years. We went to a house in Nalyvaiko street. We were to say the password and gave them a bag of flour. In the evening ewe returned to the same house, paid money and picked up our matzah. There wasn't enough matzah for the whole holiday. We ate it on the first, second and the last day of Pesach. We didn't have special Pesach dishes, but Mama thoroughly koshered our everyday dishes. We had chicken, stuffed fish and matzah bakeries on Pesach - all traditional food. The family got together at the table, and Mama's sisters came with their families. On Chanukkah the chanukkiyah was lit in the house. To make the long story short I'd say this - we didn't forget that we were Jews. We didn't eat pork. Mama always took her chickens to the shoihet to slaughter them. I still remember Mama's Jewish food. Papa told me about the 9th ava and why we had to fast at iom-Kipur. He told me about Purim and read Agada. We went to the synagogue only at Iom-Kipur. From 1948 this was almost forbidden.

I went to the Ukrainian school in Chernovtsy in 1945. I studied there for two years. I remember my first teacher, Nadezhda Alexandrovna. We liked her a lot. She told us about Lenin. In the 1st grade I became a Young Octobrist 13 and proudly wore my star badge. After I finished the 2nd grade a separate educational system for boys and girls was introduced, and boys went to a Russian school. There were 28 Jews out of 32 children in our class. It was easier for us to talk in Yiddish than in Russian. Besides, half of our teachers were Jews. In the 3rd grade I became a pioneer. We celebrated Soviet holidays at school: 1st May and 7th November [October Revolution Day] 14. We went to the parades and then came back to school for a meeting and a concert. After the parade we had ice cream, which was an event in itself for us, considering that this was the period of lack of food. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home.

In the 5th grade we got a new class tutor, Artyom Terentievich Molchanov. He was Byelarus, a retired military, and married to a Jewish woman. We all remember him with respect and love. He ignored mandatory political information requirements, but each week one of us had to prepare a

report about an interesting historical event that happened during that week in the past. These reports taught us how to use the library and work with historical data. We also learned to speak in front of the an audience and keep them interested.

In the 8th grade I became a Komsomol 15 member. I had been looking forward to it. I believed that my life would change and become more interesting. After I had been a member for some time I realized that two copeckthe two-copeck fee per month I paid was all that it was about it. When I was a student at university I 'lost' my membership card with all my great pleasure.

Many children in our class went in for sports. I couldn't catch up with them. I was weaker than the others due to the years I spent in the fascist camp. Therefore So, I had very little interest in sports. I read and was fond of theater instead. They established a people's theater in the Jewish theater. Mihail Loev, the producer at the Jewish theater, was its director. I took part in their performances and continued, even later when I became a school teacherschoolteacher.

In 1948 I was 11. I remember the campaign against cosmopolitism, although it didn't touch our family. I was the only boy in our class that had a father. The others perished at the front. Other boys had only mothers that were working hard to raise their children. Accordingly, none of them had anything to do with ideology. I remember that our deputy director Maria Abramovna Levina lost her position. She worked as a chemistry teacher. I was too young then to understand what was going on. There was no real anti-Semitism at school, but I remember one incident. In 1954, when we were in the 10th grade, one boy called another boy 'zhyd' [kike] because that other boy didn't let him rewrite something in mathematics. We didn't beat him. We knew that we couldn't use physical strength. We had a Komsomol meeting where everyone spoke. That boy felt that everyone despised him for what he had done and left our school.

In 1948 we heard that Israel was being established. My family and friends were enthusiastic about it. We, boys, were thinking of what we could do for this country. At first we wanted to collect some money, but how much could we have possibly collected? Then my friends started talking about running away to Israel. But how would we have managed to do that? And what could I have done alone, without my father and mother, without knowing the language? There were too many questions and no answers, so we decided to run away later, after finishing school.

I remember the campaign against cosmopolitans, although it didn't affect our family. I was the only boy in our class who still had a father. The fathers of the other children had all perished at the front. Other boys had only mothers who were working hard to raise their children. Accordingly, none of them had anything to do with ideology. I remember that our deputy director, Maria Abramovna Levina, lost her position. She worked as a chemistry teacher. I was too young then to understand what was going on. I remember the beginning of 1953 - the 'case of the doctors-murderers' [the so-called Doctors' Plot] 16. I was in the 9th grade. We were talking about it once, and one boy said that in any nation there were bad people and Jews weren't an exception. His companion slapped him on the face and said, 'Don't you see: It's the Beilis' case!' 17

At about the same time people began to talk about the deportation of Jews [to Birobidzhan] 18. We knew that these weren't just rumors. Broha's husband was a railway worker and he said there were trains at the station ready to leave. My father packed our suitcases with all necessary things to be ready in case of a deportation. Stalin's death in 1953 saved us from this lot. At that time I didn't understand many things. Stalin's death was a shock for me. I wore a red arm bandarmband with a

black stripe. I didn't know at all how to go on living without Stalin. My parents took the news very calmly. My father understood a lot, but he kept silent. I don't know whether he knew the whole truth.

I studied well. My father wanted me to go to a trade school to learn some profession after I finished seven years at school. He was very ill, and he wanted to be sure that there would be someone to support the family once he would 'leave' us. But I was eager to study. I knew that I had to work and support my family, but I couldn't imagine leaving school before finishing it. When I was in the 7th grade I began to give private classes. My first student was from the 5th grade. His parents didn't pay me but they gave me food. My second student paid me 3 rubles per lesson. It wasn't just the money that attracted me but also the possibility to be a teacher. My father told me that I had been named in honor of one of his relatives, who was a teacher at cheder, and joked that I probably also borrowed his vocation. My parents gave me the opportunity to finish secondary school. My father died in 1957, and my mother died in 1977.

In our family only Isaak, Broha's husband, could read and write in Yiddish. There was no radio or TV and he used to read the books of Sholem Aleichem 19 to us in Yiddish in the evenings. We knew the language. But I wanted to learn how to read. I began to learn from the books of Sholem Aleichem. It took me two years and I had to learn each and every letter, but I managed. Later on I had no problems with reading in Yiddish.

At that time anti-Semitism on the state level was at its height in Chernovtsy. I tried to enter the university in Chernovtsy, although I knew what rector Leutskiy had said, 'There will be as many Jews at university as on the virgin lands'. [Editor's note: The rector was referring to the virgin lands in Kazakhstan, where historically there were no Jews.] At that time the Soviet power started another utopian project - the development of the virgin lands of Kazakhstan, although this was saline land and nothing could grow there if there was no irrigation. At my entrance exams I got a '5' for composition, but a '3' in history, although history was my favorite subject and this was evidently a prejudiced attitude. I failed to enter university, and I couldn't depend on my mother any longer, so and I went to the virgin lands. I worked there for a year. Then I decided to try again in Vologda. In 1955 my brother Abram lived there. Anti-Semitism in the far- away land wasn't as pronouncedexpressed as in Ukraine, probably because there were fewer Jews there. I entered the Department of Physics at Vologda University. I didn't face any anti-Semitism in my daily life. I studied well. Money was always a problem. I always passed my exams in winter in advance so that I'd be able to work at the wood cutting site. It was hard but well-paid work. My earnings for a month or a month and a half lasted me until summer. I went to Chernovtsy in summer. I worked at the children's summer camp where I had meals and earned some money. And I could see my mother, my father and my friends.

TThere were expressions of anti-Semitism in the pioneer camp. I remember one Sunday, the day when parents could visit their children. The family of one of my pupils called me. His father was an actor at the former Jewish theater. They complained thatto one of the children called their son 'zhyd' [kike] and asked me what I could do to punish this child. And I, a 20 year old20-year-old young man at the time, said to his father, 'Do you want me to send that boy home from the camp? That's impossible. Or beat him? I can't. You are the father and it's all up to you. I don't know who you are, but you must help your son. He will be facing this kind of thing in the future, too. He must learn how to deal with it. He was called zhyd and that means Jew. He is a Jew, and he must be

proud of it. You must tell him about Jews and their history and traditions.'. The boy's father liked my response very much.

After university I got a job assignment in a Moldavian village and worked there for two years as a teacher of physics. Afterwards I and returned to Chernovtsy. It was hard to get a job there - my Jewish nationality was a problem. I got a part-time job first and then became a full-time teacher of physics. I worked for 36 years. I was also was a class tutor, a hiking club chief and a producer of school performances. Besides, I also acted in performances of the theatrical studio at the House of Teachers. There was a lot of work at school that took up my spare time - political information hours, meetings, etc. All children had to go to parades on Soviet holidays. They were bored and didn't want to go there, but they all went if I promised that we would go to the woods afterwards and bake potatoes. Hiking was our favorite hobby. We traveled all over Bukovina. My former pupils still visit me, and we recall our evenings by the fire. I liked children and they liked me in return.

I've never been a Pparty member, and after the Twentieth Party?? Congress 20 it was out of the question for me.

I've been married twice. I first got married in 1961. The mother of my future wife, Svetlana Krasilschikova, was my mother's friend. They werehad an absolutely assimilated Jewish family. They didn't have a feeling of their Jewish roots and didn't remember their origin. At that time Svetlana was working after in the Geography Department of Astrakhan University in Russia. We weare the same age. She came to visit her mother, and that's when we met. We got married soon and Svetlana moved to Chernovtsy. We didn't have a wedding party. We had a civil ceremony and a dinner at her home attended by about 20 relatives and closest friends.

Svetlana got a job asof a a statistics specialist, but she didn't like it. We had two sons. Alexandr was born in 1963 and Konstantin in 1976. Svetlana didn't accept me the way I was. She didn't like a life with a school teacherschoolteacher with a big work-load and a small salary. She didn't accept my Jewish identity, although she was a Jew herself. We lived together 16 years before we got separated. She moved to Lvov with our sons and defended her thesis there. She is a professor and Doctor of Sciences now. They all live in Lvov. Our son Alexandr works at a company. He is married and has two daughters, Katia and Olga. One studies at the Polytechnic Institute and the other one is in the 11th grade at school. Konstantin is significantly younger. He finished the Law Department of the Ukrainian Institute of International Rrelations and is a post-graduate student now. He is married but has no children as yet. Regretfully, my both my sons married Ukrainian girls. I like my daughters-in-law, though. We get along well. But it's sad to think that I'm the last of kin. My granddaughters don't identify themselves as Jews.

I got married for the second time in 1978. My second wife's name is Inna Bogomolnaya. She is a Jew. Our son Ruvim was born in 1979. Inna is much younger than me; she was born in 1956. Perhaps, that's why our marriage didn't last long. Inna and Ruvim are in Israel now. My son served in the army and now he studies at university. I met with him when I went to Israel.

My brother Abram entered Military College in Lvov and was moving all over the country after graduation. He was a professional military. He married a very nice Jewish girl called Bella after his graduation. She came from Beltsy, a Moldavian town. Bella graduated from Medical University and became a doctor. Abram and his wife lived in Vologda for some time. When I studied at university in Vologda I lived with his family. I'm grateful to my brother that he gave me an opportunity to

study. Abram and Bella have a son. When Abram retired he had the rank of a colonel. In 1979 he emigrated to Israel with his family.

My sister Broha finished the Oil College in Bashkiria. She couldn't find an adequate job with her profession in Chernovtsy and had to work as a shop assistant to support her family. In 1947 she married Isaak Shapiro, who was a widower after his wife Haya died. Broha lives with her children in Rostov, Russia now.

Lisa was an apprentice at the weaving factory. After a year she finished a course in accounting and became an accountant at the same factory. She married Aron Muravin, a Jew and former school friend. They loved each other, and my parents gave their consent to the marriage. Lisa and her husband had two daughters. Regretfully the time in the camp during the war affected Lisa's health and she died young, in 1966.

My youngest sister, Zhenia, finished a Ukrainian school and studied at the College of Finance and Economy. Zhenia got married; her name after her husband is Teleshevskaya. She had two daughters. Zhenia worked as logistics manager at the Metallist plant. Her husband worked there, too. In 1991 they decided to move to Israel. Her husband died before their departure. Now my sister and her children live in Tel-Aviv. We haven't had any mixed marriages in our family, and all marriages were successful.

When people began to move to Israel in the 1970s I got very enthusiastic about it. But my first wife didn't want to come along. After our divorce I told her that I wanted to go. She told me that she would give me her permission if I paid her the total amount of the alimony for both sons until they came of age. I have never had that much money. I didn't condemn the people who left. Vice versa - I envied them.

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991 many Jewish organizations opened in Chernovtsy. I was retired. I became a volunteer. There were 12 of us. We had to make lists of needy and elderly people and think of how to help them. Then there was a vacancy for a social worker. I got the job. I received a salary equivalent to US$ 15. In due time I founded the Jewish Charity Committee. I'm its director now. We look for opportunities to help needy and ill people. I find sponsors. We have a canteen where we provide meals for 60 people. The food comesd from a restaurant, and it's very delicious. During the meal I read a Jewish newspaper to the people. We discuss Jewish subjects and other issues.

We have 25 children on our lists. Once every month and a half we send them food, clothes and medication. They are children with cerebral palsy, children of single mothers and orphans. We can also send a family 50 hrivna for medication, repairs in the apartment or for them to pay off their debts. I feel that people need me and that I can help them.

But that's not all. I realized that people need communication and culture besides physical survival. With the help of sponsors we established a round club. This club is open twice a week - one day for older and the other day for younger people. We discuss the Jewish subjects and sing Jewish songs. Housewives share secrets of the Jewish cuisine. This is a little bit different from what I expected it to be. I thought people would be sitting at the tables rather than sitting at one long table. But we couldn't afford it. In any case - it's still an interesting pastime.

I live here, in Ukraine, and this committee is my creation. I've been in Israel three times. I like it there, but I'm busy here. I know that if I emigrated to Israel I would be sitting at home thinking, 'Well, where does it ache today?'. Whereas here I'm busy and have no possibility to get ill. I have a son, a sister and a brother in Israel, but I'm still here. I know that if I leave I will loose my contacts that I've established over the past 10 years. My assistant is learning how to work. But as it's my 'child' I'm reluctant to leave it in somebody else's hands, even the most caring ones. It's most important that my people live and remember the place where we grew up. And that we know who we are, why we are here and what we are to do.

Glossary

**1 Peter the Great (1672-1725)**
Tsar of Russia from 1689-1725. Peter Europeanized Russia by imposing Western ideas and customs on his subjects. His interests were wide-ranging: among others, he founded the Russian navy, reorganized the army on the Western lines, bound the administration of the church to that of the state and reformed the Russian alphabet. His introduction of Western ways was the basis for the split between upper classes and peasants that was to plague Russian society until the Revolution of 1917.

**2 Catherine the Great (1729-1796)**
Empress of Russia. She rose to the throne after the murder of her husband Peter III and reigned for 34 year. Catherine read widely, especially Voltaire and Montesquieu, and informed herself of Russian conditions. She started to formulate a new enlightened code of law. Catherine reorganized (1775) the provincial administration to increase the central government's control over rural areas. This reform established a system of provinces, subdivided into districts, that endured until 1917. In 1785, Catherine issued a charter that made the gentry of each district and province a legal body with the right to petition the throne, freed nobles from taxation and state service and made their status hereditary, and gave them absolute control over their lands and peasants. Catherine increased Russian control over the Baltic provinces and Ukraine. She secured the largest portion in successive partitions of Poland among Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

**3 Pogroms in Ukraine**
In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

**4 Russian Revolution of 1917**
Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### 5 Jewish self-defense movement

In Russia Jews organized self-defense groups to protect the Jewish population and Jewish property from the rioting mobs in pogroms, which often occurred in compliance with the authorities and, at times, even at their instigation. During the pogroms of 1881-82 self-defense was organized spontaneously in different places. Following pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century, collective defense units were set up in the cities and towns of Belarus and Ukraine, which raised money and bought arms. The nucleus of the self-defense movement came from the Jewish labor parties and their military units, and it had a widespread following among the rest of the people. Organized defense groups are known to have existed in 42 cities.

### 6 Keep in touch with relatives abroad

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

### 7 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti- communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti- Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### 8 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### 9 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without

declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

### 10 Struggle against religion

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

### 11 Famine in Ukraine

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

### 12 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The antisemitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

### 13 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

### 14 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

### 15 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

**16 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

**17 Beilis case**

A Jew called M. Beilis was falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Russian boy in Kiev in 1913. This trial was arranged by the tsarist government and the Black Hundred. It provoked protest from all progressive people in Russia and abroad. The jury finally acquitted him.

**18 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidjan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

**19 Sholem Aleichem (born Shalom Nohumovich Rabinovich (1859-1916)**

Jewish writer. He lived in Russia and moved to the US in 1914. He wrote about the life of Jews in Russia in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian.

**20 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR

during Stalin's leadership.
Know that we are people. All the best and peace to all Jews!!

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into pioneers.