Tsylia Aguf

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Kiev
Ukraine
Interviewer: Elena Zaslavskaya
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Tsylia Aguf is a nice charming lady. She is very sociable and active. She participates in a number of programs of Hesed. She has many friends and acquaintances. Most of them are of Jewish nationality. She must have been very pretty when she was young. She has pleasant memories about many of her admirers. She loves her children and grandchildren. She has a clean home, furnished with furniture from the 1960s. She has many books.

My family background

My grandparents on my father's side died long before I was born. All I know is that my grandfather, Ovsey Pekar, was born in the small town of Korostyshev [30 km from Zhytomir] in the 1870s. There were about 4,000 Jews in town. There were a few synagogues. There were also Ukrainian inhabitants. There were no nationality conflicts. Jews and Ukrainians supported each other. My grandfather owned a small food and haberdashery store. He spent a lot of time at work. He provided well for his family. They lived in a solid wooden house. My grandfather was religious. He went to the synagogue on Saturdays and celebrated all holidays.

My grandmother, Tsyvia Pekar, was born in Korostyshev in the early 1870s. She got married when she was young. She was a housewife. She was moderately religious, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. She didn't attend the synagogue. During rush hours she helped her husband in the store. My grandmother was killed by bandits in 1919 1. My father told me that they stunned her at the gate of her house, trying to remove her jewelry. My grandmother defended herself, and they began to hit her on the head. She died of the injuries. My grandfather couldn't bear the pain of the loss of her and died from an infarction ten days later.

My grandparents had five children: two sons and three daughters. They all left their parents' home when they were in their teens. They grew up as atheists and didn't observe any traditions.

My father's sister, Rachel Pekar, was born in Korostyshev in the early 1900s. She finished a Jewish grammar school there. After 1917 she lived in the town of Gostomel [20 km from Kiev]. There were only a few Jewish families in Gostomel. Rachel was a laborer at the Factory of Musical Instruments.

She remained single. She perished in 1941 when the Germans occupied Gostomel.

My father's brother, Ilia Pekar, was born in Korostyshev in the middle of the 1900s. He finished cheder, Jewish grammar school and an accounting school in Kiev. He worked as an accountant in an office in Kiev. He was married but had no children. He died of cancer in the late 1930s and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev.

My father's second sister, Sarah Pekar, was born in Korostyshev in the late 1900s. She got married and moved to Zhytomir [150 km from Kiev]. There were many wealthy Jews in town at the time. There were a few synagogues, a Jewish hospital and Jewish stores. Jews were craftsmen and merchants. There were a few Jewish schools and a yeshivah in Zhytomir. Sarah's husband was a shoemaker. They both died in Zhytomir in the late 1930s. Sarah's daughter, Tsylia, lives in the US. I correspond with her.

My father's youngest sister, Rosa Pekar, was born in the early 1910s. She was born blind. She was short and pretty. She had wide-open blue eyes, and one couldn't tell that she was blind. She finished Russian secondary school in Korostyshev and graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Kiev. She studied at the Postgraduate Philosophy Faculty. She read special books for blind people. Rosa lived in the hostel of Kiev University. She had a room of her own, which was unusual for the time. She kept her room very tidy. When she studied at the university, they provided a woman to read for her. After finishing her postgraduate course she became a lecturer of philosophy at the university. She had admirers, regardless of her blindness. Rosa perished in Babi Yar 2 in 1941. Our distant non-Jewish acquaintance took Rosa there by her hand. She bought her a loaf of bread and butter for the road and accompanied her without knowing that Rosa was destined to die there. She told us later how she died.

My father, Moisey Pekar, was born in Korostyshev in 1900. He finished cheder and a Jewish secondary school. He studied Hebrew and Yiddish. After the Revolution of 1917 the Soviet power expropriated my grandfather's store, and my father had to work to provide for his brother and sister. He finished an accounting school and left for Teterev, a small town near Kiev, located in a beautiful pine-wood. He got an accounting job at the logging facility owned by my mother's father. He met my mother while working in Teterev. My father was a very decent and honest man. He read many books in Russian and Yiddish. My grandfather on my mother's side, Khaim-Duvid Polischuk, was born in Radomyshl in 1879. Radomyshl was a small town in Kiev province [60 km from Kiev]. At the end of the 19th century there were about 7,000 Jews in town. There were several synagogues, Jewish shops and hospitals, Jewish schools for boys and girls and a yeshivah. Most of the Jewish families were wealthy. Jews were craftsmen and merchants. There were also Ukrainian inhabitants. The Jews and the Ukrainians got along well.

My grandfather finished cheder and a Jewish school in Radomyshl. He was a timber dealer. He was a very religious man. He prayed, observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays.

Before the Revolution of 1917 my grandfather and his family moved to Teterev where he built a house. He started his own logging and timber business there. He believed that the woods near Teterev were better than in Radomyshl and that his trade would be more successful.

There was no Jewish community in Teterev and there was no synagogue. There were very few Jewish families in town, and my grandfather gathered a minyan, ten Jewish men, at his home.

There were a few Jewish men from the surrounding villages besides those from Teterev. My grandfather had his tallit and tefillin on and said his prayer swaying to and fro. Other Jewish men followed him. On weekdays my grandfather wore his customary clothes. He didn't wear a hat. He only put a cap on to say a prayer.

Ukrainians liked my grandfather. They asked his advice in family disputes and educational issues like where to get a teacher for a child. Those who were illiterate often asked my grandfather to read letters for them and my grandfather always supported them. He was a very kind and wise man. In 1918- 1919, during the many pogroms 3 in the Jewish neighborhoods of Ukrainian towns, Ukrainian men guarded my grandfather's home and rescued him from bandits more than once.

My grandmother on my mother's side, Tatiana Pekar, nee Taibn, was born to a wealthy Jewish family in Stavishche, Kiev province, in 1880. The Jewish community numbered almost 4,000 Jews. There were several- synagogues and Jewish schools in town. Jews were mainly craftsmen and merchants.

My grandmother had teachers who taught her at home. She studied arithmetic, Yiddish and Hebrew. She could read and write in Yiddish and had a good conduct of Russian and Ukrainian. She was religious. She celebrated Jewish holidays, lit candles on Saturdays and celebrated Sabbath. She didn't wear a shawl or a wig. My grandmother and grandfather were very much in love with one another. He tenderly called his wife Feygl ['my little bird' in Yiddish]. He often asked conductors of passing trains to bring her olives or sweets from Kiev. On their way back they gave these things to my grandfather, and he generously tipped them. Any caprice of my grandmother was a must for my grandfather.

After the Revolution of 1917 my grandfather became the supervisor of a timber agency. He wasn't very enthusiastic about the revolutionary ideas of fraternity and equality of all people. He didn't become an atheist, either. My grandmother, on the other hand, was inspired by Lenin's idea of universal wealth that was about to come. She read Lenin's books in Russian.

My grandparents had seven daughters and a son. My mother's sister, Frania Polischuk, was born in Radomyshl in the middle of the 1890s. She finished a Russian grammar school in Kiev. She didn't work. She was very sickly and died in Kiev in the 1930s. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev.

The next sister, Ida Grinberg [nee Polischuk], was born in Radomyshl in the late 1890s. She finished a Russian grammar school and a pedagogical school in Kiev. She was a teacher of natural sciences. She married Grigoriy Grinberg, a Jewish man, and they had three children: Sarah, Yasha and Milia. She divorced her husband and married a non-Jewish man, a former officer of the tsarist army. My grandfather disavowed Ida when he heard that she had married a non-Jew. Ida's marriage didn't last - her husband died. I remember Ida coming home after her non-Jewish husband passed away, approaching her father's bed, kneeling down and asking his forgiveness. My grandfather forgave her. Ida lived in Makarov, near Kiev, where she worked as a teacher at a secondary school in the last years of her life. She died in Makarov in the late 1930s.

My mother's other sisters, Rachel and Eidia Polischuk, were twins. They were born in Radomyshl in the middle of the 1900s. They finished a Russian grammar school and graduated from the Medical Institute in Kiev. During the war they were in evacuation in Kuibyshev where they got married.

They stayed in Kuibyshev after the war and worked as doctors. They died in Kuibyshev in the middle of the 1970s. They were buried in the cemetery in Kuibyshev.

The next sister, Genia Verba [nee Polischuk], was born in Radomyshl in the early 1900s. She finished a Russian grammar school in Kiev. She got fond of revolutionary ideas and became the secretary of the district committee of the Communist Party in the small town of Monastyrishche [80 km from Kiev]. There were a few Jewish families in Monastyrishche, but there was no synagogue in town. Genia married Falik Verba, a devoted communist and party activist. They moved to Tbilisi [Georgia] in the middle of the 1930s. Genia died in the middle of the 1950s. She didn't have any children. I don't know where she was buried.

The youngest sister, Khinia Godik [nee Polischuk], was born in Radomyshl in the early 1900s. She finished a Russian grammar school in Kiev and graduated from the Medical Institute in Kharkov. She became a pharmacist. She married Boris Godik, a Jewish man. He perished during the Great Patriotic War 4. During the war Khinia was in evacuation in Ufa [2,500 km from Kiev], where she stayed after the war. She died there in the 1970s. She was buried in the town cemetery.

My mother's brother, Dmitriy Polischuk, went to cheder and then finished a Russian grammar school in Kiev. He graduated from the Medical Institute in Kiev. During the Great Patriotic War he was a doctor in hospitals. At the end of the war he held the rank of a colonel of medical services, and as of 1946 he was the director of the hospital in Novograd-Volynskiy. In the 1960s he got a job assignment in Ufa where he died in the 1970s. I don't know where he was buried. His son, Tsalia Polischuk, a student of the Kiev Medical University, perished near Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War.

My mother's sisters and brother and their families tried to observe Jewish traditions. They weren't deeply religious and didn't go to the synagogue, but they never forgot that they were Jewish. They had matzah on Pesach, didn't eat pork and didn't mix meat and dairy products, although they didn't follow the kashrut laws [strictly].

My mother, Esphir Pekar [nee Polischuk], was born in Radomyshl in 1900. She came from a wealthy family and she got an opportunity to finish Russian grammar school in Kiev. She told me that she was a pretty girl. When she was 10-12 years old, she collected money for a charity for children's homes with the son of the director of the grammar school. They had a poster with an appeal to contribute money for children's homes and collected contributions on trains. This boy was my mother's first love.

My mother didn't continue her education. In 1920 she met one of her father's employees. They liked each other, but they came from different social layers. He was a clerk, and she was the daughter of a business owner. That stood in the way of their marriage. They were meeting secretly. When my grandfather understood that my father had serious intentions he gave his consent to their marriage.

My parents got married in Teterev in 1920. They had a rich traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and klezmer musicians. After the wedding the young couple moved to Kiev where my mother's older sisters lived and worked. They rented an apartment in the center of the city. My father got a job as an accountant in an office, and my mother became a housewife.

Growing up

I was born in Kiev in 1921, and my sister, Maria, was born in 1923. My parents lived in Kiev for five years. They didn't quite like living in a big city. My mother's father also wanted them to move to Teterev. We moved there in 1925. My father got a job as a forester. My grandfather built a spacious house for us with eight rooms and nice furniture. There was a children's room, a living room and a study for my father in the house. We had big rubber plants in the living room. Our house and my grandfather's house were close to each other. My first impression of Teterev were geese. There were so many of them walking across the town and hissing at people.

My grandfather was a deeply religious man, and he cared about traditions a lot. He didn't want Jews to forget their identity and follow the slogans of the Bolsheviks about the elimination of religion. Jewish men used to come to my grandfather's house for Sabbath prayer. If there were less than ten men, my grandfather asked my father to attend their prayer, although my father was a convinced atheist. My father used to sit there reading his newspaper while the others were saying their prayer.

Once I got into the room during a prayer and tied together the tassels of the tallitim. The men didn't notice anything. Only when the prayer was over and it was time for them to go home did they find out that they were tied together. My grandfather was terribly angry with me - for the first and last time in my life.

I have no memories about Sabbath. I think we didn't have a festive dinner on Sabbath. Praying was the most important for my grandfather.

I remember how we prepared to celebrate Pesach. At first we did a general clean up of the house making sure that there were no breadcrumbs left in the house. Then flour was delivered to the house, and we began to make matzah. Jews from all the neighboring settlements came to make matzah at my grandfather's house. My grandmother and other women made the dough for the matzah. To eliminate any doubt about the kashrut of the matzah a baker came from Kiev. He rolled out the dough and put it into the oven. We didn't eat bread for a whole week during Pesach.

Before Pesach we took special fancy dishes and kitchen utensils from the attic and put our casual utensils in the attic. If there weren't enough utensils everyday ones were taken to a pit with boiling water in the yard. There was a hot stone in the pit to keep the water hot. Forks and spoons were tied together with a rope before they were put into the pit. Forks and spoons and other utensils were put into the pit to be kosher for the use on Pesach. My mother's sisters, her brother and their families came to the first seder from Kiev. During the seder we were leaning against pillows according to the tradition like free people, not slaves. [Editor's note: all these ritual are written down in the Haggadah.] My grandfather, who sat at the head of the table wearing a tuxedo, conducted the seder and said prayers.

My duty was to ask the four questions about the traditions of this holiday during seder. I knew them by heart, and when the time came I recited them in Yiddish. There was a saucer with some matzah covered with a white napkin on the table. I was supposed to hide it. The one who found it had to give me ransom. I liked all these processes. I hid the saucer with matzah somewhere safe and enjoyed watching the others searching for it. Someone found it and I received a little money [Editor's note: this tradition generally goes inversely: an adult hides the matzah, called afikoman,

and if a child finds it he gets some present.] After the official seder ceremony, when people at the table recalled the history of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and ate a bit of meat, bitter greeneries, and a piece of boiled egg, the feast began. There was Gefilte fish, sweet and sour stew and dishes made of matzah flour on the table. I was so small that that's all I remember about it.

I also have some memories of the celebration of Chanukkah in our house. I remember my grandmother and mother lighting the Chanukkah candles, saying short Chanukkah prayers and singing special songs. It was also good to receive some money on Chanukkah. I could buy something for this money. Once I bought sweaters for my sister and me. My grandmother always made pancakes with geese fat on Chanukkah.

On Yom Kippur the whole family fasted and remembered the deceased relatives. My grandmother and grandfather went to the cemetery to recite the Kaddish.

During the week we had bean soup with meat, baked potatoes and boiled beans, marinated beetroots and red borsch and sauerkraut. We mostly had chicken that we took to a shochet, who lived nearby, to have it slaughtered. We also ate rabbits. [Editor's note: rabbits are not kosher meat, but this food was customary for the family.] Chicken meat had to be soaked in water for two hours and kept in salt for another two hours to get rid of all the blood. After this the meat became kosher and could be cooked.

In winter we sometimes had a slice of pork fat - it was considered to be very good for us. Pork fat was kept separate from all the other food to follow the kashrut rules. There was also a special plate for slices of fat. Pork fat was supposed to give you much energy and helped us to keep ourselves warm in cold weather. A small slice of pork was quite sufficient to stay healthier.

There was no kindergarten in Teterev. My mother taught me to read and write before I went to school. We also learned poems by heart. My mother knew many poems by Russian and Ukrainian poets. My mother was also fond of singing and often sang a sad song about Beilis 5 in Russian. I can still remember the lyrics. In 1928 my younger sister, Asia, was born, and I became her baby sitter.

I was my grandparents' favorite. They spoiled me a lot. I always got the best presents like an expensive sweater, pants or a toy, on holidays and the most money on Chanukkah. I had many toys and many dolls. I never had to clean the house. My grandfather told me to ask my younger sister Manya to do it. I was cuddled and didn't have set chores about the house. Manya dusted rugs in the hallway. However, I was a good girl and tried to do many things myself. My grandfather tenderly called me 'goat', probably because I was rather restless. I loved to jump up and kiss him on the bald patch of his beard.

I went to primary school in Teterev in 1928. There were two classrooms in our school, one for the 1st and 3rd forms and another one for the 2nd and 4th forms. We had two teachers: Alexei Romanovich and Ludmila Mikhailovna. They were married. I didn't like them, because they punished me. Once I got hungry during the class and decided to eat an apple. They made me eat my apple in front of the class to punish me for the violation of discipline. I could never forget that. There were actually no Jews in Teterev. I was the only Jewish pupil in my class. But I didn't face any anti-Semitism.

The 1930s were very difficult. [The interviewee refers to the Ukrainian famine.] 6 We had to stand in lines near the only small store in Teterev for hours and hours hoping to get some bread. Sometimes we managed to buy grain wastes to make bread ourselves. Our main food was potato peels. In spring 1932 my mother got a job as a guard of carrot fields in the neighboring collective farm. She used to bring a few carrots home. Carrots supported us a little bit.

I was rather spoiled and refused junk food. I got swollen up from hunger. In summer 1933 my mother's sister, Genia, came to visit us. She didn't have any children. When she saw my condition she took me with her. I went to the primary school in Monastyrishche. I believe, I was the only Jew in my class, but I got along well with the other children and didn't face any anti-Semitism. My aunt bought me homemade riazhanka [yogurt] at the market every day. It was a luxury for the time, but my aunt had a good income and could afford it. Once thieves broke into our house. They stole two herrings that my aunt received in her party food package. My most horrific memory from that time was a jellied meat dish made from the flesh of a child. My aunt took me to a party meeting where some people brought this dish to. It turned out that a woman from a village had slaughtered her stepson and cooked the meat. I remember how horrified I was. Of course things like this were criminal, but people went crazy from starvation. She did it when she was not quite herself, and she was taken to a mental hospital after.

There was a road leading to the cemetery in Monastyrishche not far from our house. Every day villagers took their deceased relatives, who had starved to death, to the cemetery. I used to go for walks in Monastyrishche by myself. Once I was followed by a man with a knife. I hardly managed to hide behind my aunt's gate. I ran fast and that rescued me from that man. Very often people were losing their mind from hunger. After this incident my aunt took me back to Teterev as it became dangerous to stay in Monastyrishche.

In 1933 the Bolsheviks took away the house built by my grandfather. We moved to Zhytomir where my father's sister Sarah lived. After we moved we didn't celebrate any Jewish traditions. We studied in Jewish schools, and our mother was more concerned about providing for us than traditions. The only difference between Jewish and other schools at that time was the language of teaching. We studied the same subjects and this school was similar to any other Ukrainian or Russian school. Our father fell ill with encephalitis. He was paralyzed and our mother had to take care of the family. I became responsible for all the housekeeping. My sister Manya looked after our house. My mother worked as a cashier at a barber's in Zhytomir, and later she went to work at a lemonade factory. She washed bottles there. She got a very low salary for it. To help my mother provide for the family, I also went to work at the factory part time, filling bottles with lemonade.

My mother's sisters came to visit us in 1935. They decided that it would be better for the children to be in a children's home. But when they told my mother about their idea her face got distorted at the thought. My mother fell ill and had to go to hospital. She recovered from her shock, but her face remained distorted. The children stayed with the family.

I enjoyed studying at school. I was an easy-going and sociable girl. I became a pioneer and then a Komsomol 7 member. All children joined the Komsomol league, and I just followed the common procedure. I didn't take part in any public activities. I liked dancing and acting. I had many non-Jewish friends. We spent a lot of time together. Once they took me to the night service at a Christian church. It was a beautiful service, but I got tired of standing for such long hours. I didn't

feel remorse for going to a church. It didn't even occur to me that I was doing something wrong. I was a pretty girl and played main parts in our school performances. I enjoyed acting very much.

The period of the Stalinist repression [the Great Terror] 8 didn't affect our family. We didn't discuss this subject in the family. My mother and father were very ill and there was nobody else to discuss it with. I only remember how my grandmother's lips trembled when she pronounced the name of Stalin. She hated him, but she never explained the reasons to us, and we were too young to ask.

In 1937 my father died in a hospital in Kiev where he was brought to by my mother's sisters. My father was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev. It was a huge loss to me, although we knew that he was severely ill and death was only a matter of time. After my father died a Jewish man began to court my mother. I don't remember his name. If it hadn't been for me my mother would have married him. I couldn't imagine another man to take my father's place. I cried a few nights in a row, and my mother didn't dare to start living with him.

I often went to dancing parties. My mother was concerned about me and always chaperoned me there. Young men that wanted to invite me to dance had to ask her permission. It was okay with me. I felt protected, and when I didn't like a young man, I could always refer to my mother's presence. I had admirers. I remember a Korean man, Venia Kim, kissing me for the first time. A studio was shooting a film in Teterev. There were a few Korean actors there. One of them asked me whether he could escort me home. He kissed me good-bye and I felt so ashamed. At home I took different cups of tableware. I covered my eyes with them until I forgot about the incident. Venia Kim wrote me letters for a long time.

I finished school in 1937 and entered the Faculty of Philosophy at the Kiev Pedagogical Institute. I actually wanted to become an actress, but my father said once that one had to be exceptionally talented to become an actor. He didn't believe I was particularly gifted, and I couldn't do anything against his will. He had great influence on me.

I lived in a hostel in Kiev. There were four of us in a room. We got along very well. We didn't have enough food and scrubbed our pockets for a few kopecks to buy half a loaf of bread. When we got a stipend we bought khalva [oriental sweet mass]. We couldn't afford to buy tea. Sometimes in summer we bought a watermelon. We locked our room so nobody would come in and eat the watermelon. I fainted from hunger in class several times. I gave Russian lessons to earn some money. I received 80 rubles, which was hardly enough to buy bread.

I was the Komsomol leader of my group at the Institute and later I became a member of the Komsomol bureau of the Institute. One summer I was awarded a trip to Alushta [resort at the South coast of the Crimea]. I traveled by train for the first time in my life. I have the brightest memory of the beach divided into two parts: one for men and another one for women. It had nothing to do with religious rules. There were people of different nationalities. It was because holiday makers were nude on the beach and that's why there were separate beaches for men and women. My acquaintances tried to convince me to drop any prejudices and take off my clothes, but I couldn't - this was the way I was brought up. We could lie in the sun and bathe nude, but I didn't dare. I wore a black swimming suit.

I had many admirers at the Institute. I didn't have a problem of meeting young people, but I didn't quite know who I needed. I met my future husband at a party at the Institute. His name was Mark

Aguf, and he was a Jew. He was a student at the Faculty of Architecture at the Kiev Art Institute. He fell in love with me.

During the war

In June 1941 I went to work as a pioneer leader at a pioneer camp in Vorzel, a small town near Kiev. I was there when the Great Patriotic War began on 22nd June 1941. I went back to Kiev. My husband-to-be insisted that I evacuated with him and his parents. I went with them without saying good-bye to my family and friends. I didn't have any luggage with me either. The train we took belonged to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. My husband's father was a party official and got train tickets for the whole family. He joined the Territorial Army to defend Kiev. It was a comfortable train. It didn't stop or wasn't kept longer than necessary at stations, and we reached Kustanay in Northern Kazakhstan [2,500 km from Kiev] very soon. Kustanay was a small town populated with Kazakh people. There were no Jewish families in the town. Mark and I got married there. We had a civil ceremony and obtained our marriage certificate at a registry office.

My husband was born to a Jewish family in Kharkov in 1919. His father, Michael Aguf, was born in Lugansk, Eastern Ukraine, in 1888. His mother died when Michael was 3 years old. His father married another woman. He didn't get along with her. When my husband's father was young he got inspired by revolutionary ideas and joined the Communist Party. Before the Revolution of 1917, when he was 18, he was arrested on charge of undermining the tsarist regime and revolutionary activities. He was in jail for four years and then he was sent to exile in Siberia 9. After the revolution the Bolsheviks released him and he made a party career. In 1918 he began to work at the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party located in Kharkov at that time. He married Elena Eskina, a Jewish woman, and their twin sons, Mark and Boris, were born in Kharkov in 1919.

My husband's mother was born in the small Jewish town of Stavishche, near Kiev, in the 1870s. There were about 1,500 Jewish families in this town. There were several synagogues and a Jewish school. Elena finished a Russian grammar school in Kiev and a high school for girls. She was a very intelligent woman. She didn't observe any Jewish traditions and didn't speak Yiddish.

In the middle of the 1920s Michael Aguf got a high official party position in Kiev. He was a very educated and intelligent man and soon became the secretary of the Union of Ukrainian Writers. His wife was an editor with a magazine. When they moved to Kiev they got a luxurious apartment in the building that belonged to the Union of Ukrainian Writers. There were polished parquet floors, expensive furniture and carpets in the apartment. They had a huge collection of books by Soviet and foreign writers. They didn't have any Jewish books and didn't observe any Jewish traditions. They spoke Russian.

My husband's twin brother, Boris Aguf, finished a Russian secondary school in Kiev. He studied at the Pedagogical Institute, went in for sports and wrote poems. He took part in the Finnish campaign in 1939 10. In 1941 he went to the front and perished. Any mentioning of his name caused pain to his relatives.

My husband finished a Russian secondary school in Kiev and entered the Faculty of Architecture at the Kiev Art Institute. By the time I met him he was a 4th year student.

The day after we got married he went to the military registry office to ask them to cancel his release from the service in the army that he had as a 5th year student of a higher educational institution. Within a week's time he went to the front. I was pregnant. I was very upset because I thought that it was untimely to have a baby. I carried heavy loads to terminate my pregnancy, but it didn't work. I gave birth to a strong healthy girl in Kustanay in 1942. I named her Victoria.

Our first winter in Kustanay was very cold and hard. We got a room in a wooden house where I lived with my husband's parents. Our landlords were Kazakh. They treated us very nicely and liked to play with my daughter. I didn't face any anti-Semitism during evacuation. In spring 1942 we received a cow from a local collective farm. We had to give milk to the collective farm, but we were allowed to keep some of it for our family. We also got a plot of land. There were stones on our land, but we cleaned it up and planted potatoes. Besides, we got a smaller plot of land 5 kilometers from our house where we were allowed to plant watermelons and pumpkins.

I got a job at the local newspaper, Stalin's Way. This newspaper was published six days a week and was very popular. It was published on a demy printing paper because there was no other paper in Kustanay. The newspaper published propaganda articles about the accomplishments of the Soviet people, and local news. I was a proof-reader and edited articles before they were published. I enjoyed this work. I worked with the newspaper until it was time for us to go back to Kiev in 1944. My mother-in-law looked after my daughter. We worked at night to have the newspaper published in the morning. During the day I could work on our field. On winter nights I was scared to walk in the darkness across the deserted town. I wore boots that some of our neighbors had given to me: one boot with a sharp tip and another one with a rounded one.

At the end of 1942 my father-in-law arrived. He had to leave Kiev on foot before the Germans entered the city. He walked 5 kilometers and then caught a train. He found a job in Kustanay. He became deputy manager for logistics supplies. This agency was responsible for food and good supplies to the town. My husband was at the Leningrad and, later, at the Northwestern fronts. He had the rank of First Sergeant. He was a courier at the headquarters. Once he had to deliver a report. When he left the tent of the headquarters a shell hit and destroyed it, killing everybody inside. My husband survived. He sent us letters with his poems and small paintings.

At the beginning of 1944 my father-in-law obtained a special permit required to return to Kiev. [Until the middle of 1944 Kiev was still closed for those who wanted to return from evacuation.] Postwar Kiev made a hard impression on me. I cried bitterly when I came to Kreschatik, its main thoroughfare, and saw it ruined.

A writer lived in the apartment that had belonged to my husband's parents before the war, and it seemed impossible to get him move out. We received a small room near the center of the town. There was a big stove and almost no furniture. Our neighbors gave us some old folding beds and chairs. The water piping was ruined and we had to fetch water from a well in another yard. We had no electricity and lit a kerosene lamp when it got dark. We made soup with semolina - that was our only food. We received bread by cards but had to stand in lines for many hours.

Another thing I remember from this time is the public execution of German captives in the main square of the city. Gallows were erected in the square. The condemned Germans were taken to the square on trucks. The soldiers that carried out the execution put a rope around the necks of the captives and the truck moved on. I had nightmares about this incident for a long time afterwards.

When we returned to Kiev I began to look for a job. I couldn't find any. I was openly told that I didn't have a chance to get a job with my Jewish name, Tsylia. Then, quite incidentally, I got a position as a human resource inspector in an office. This office hired workers to restore Kreschatik. I liked the job. We also received food packages. My colleagues treated me very nicely. Once they even came to help me chop wood. In the summer they once left a huge watermelon in my office for me. They also talked with our management, and I began to receive more food in my food packages: more bread, cereal and flour. Once a group of 10-12 German prisoners of war were sent to our office. I had to make a list of their names. I remembered German from school and went to the yard to write down their names. There were only Germans in the yard. They encircled me so tightly that I could feel their breathing. I got so scared that I almost fainted. Fortunately, one of our employees was coming across the yard. He took me by my hand and led me out of the circle. The Germans did all kinds of construction activities in our office, but I was never again sent to contact them.

My husband returned from the front in 1945. He was shell-shocked, and I took him to all kinds of doctors until he finally got better.

My mother, her sisters, my two sisters and my mother's parents were in evacuation in Kuibyshev during the Great Patriotic War. I have no information about their life there because I had left without even saying goodbye to them. Throughout the war we didn't hear from them and didn't know whether they were alive. Only after I returned to Kiev in 1945, did we receive a letter from my mother. It arrived at the hostel where I had lived before the war. My acquaintances, whom I met by chance, gave it to me. The letter said that they were alive, that everything was all right with them but that they weren't going to return to Kiev. My mother, my sisters and my grandparents stayed in Kuibyshev after the war.

Post-war

I went to complete my studies at the Pedagogical Institute in Kiev in 1945, and my husband was in his 5th year at the Kiev Art Institute. I graduated from the Institute in 1947 and got a job in the Russian secondary school in the center of the city. I liked my job. I got along well with my colleagues, and the children's parents were satisfied with my work. My husband graduated from the Art Institute and became an architect with Kievproject, one of the leading design institutes in Kiev.

In 1948 the state of Israel was established. All of a sudden I had the feeling of getting a home and being protected. Those were the scary years of the campaign against cosmopolitans 11 or, to be more precise, of the height of state anti-Semitism. My husband's father began to have problems at his work with the Union of Ukrainian writers. He was accused of lack of love for his motherland and patriotism, although nobody could tell what this 'patriotism' was to be like. Such accusations were only made about Jews. We watched him very closely fearing that he might commit suicide. His ideals and belief in the fair communist society were scattered. At the beginning of 1953 Stalin died, and the process against my father-in-law stopped. On the occasion of Stalin's death I took my pupils to the meeting ground beside the school building. I was crying so heavily that I had to leave the meeting. I felt like something irremediable had happened.

My grandmother died of pneumonia in Kuibyshev in the late 1950s, and my grandfather passed away in 1960. They were buried in the town cemetery - there was no Jewish cemetery in Kuibyshev. I didn't go to the funeral. My mother and sisters notified me in a letter. I don't know if

my grandparents observed traditions after the war. My mother and sisters didn't write anything about it in their letters.

Our son, Boris, was born in 1956. We didn't raise our children Jewish. Firstly because we weren't religious and secondly because religion was persecuted by the Soviet authorities. Our children studied in Russian schools. However, they always identified themselves as Jews. They knew about the tragedy of Babi Yar. We learnt about it right after we returned to Kiev from evacuation.

We lived in one room in a communal apartment with my in-laws for 14 years. We had guests on Soviet holidays and at birthday parties. They were Jewish guests for the most part. We discussed the situation in Israel and the status of Jews in the Soviet Union. We never celebrated Jewish holidays.

Our family received a two-bedroom apartment in Kreschatik in 1966. The same year my husband's father died, and his mother passed away in 1976. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev. I was grieving over them. They were like mother and father to me. They cared for me a lot.

Our daughter, Victoria, finished a secondary school in 1968 and tried to enter the Kiev Polytechnical Institute. She passed her entrance exams but wasn't admitted. We realized that her Jewish nationality was the reason for their refusal to admit her. Victoria got a job at the Arsenal plant [a big military plant in Kiev that specialized in the production of optical devices]. After working at the plant for several years, she entered the Moscow Aviation Institute, where she studied by correspondence. She graduated as an optical tools specialist. She began to work at the design office of the same plant.

In the 1970s, when large numbers of Jews were leaving the country, my husband and I firmly decided to stay. We both enjoyed work. My husband wrote books on architecture and defended his thesis. Our daughter wanted to move, though. It was her dream to travel to Cyprus and Greece, and moving to Israel seemed to bring her a step closer to have her dream come true. Well, she got married in 1974 and a year later her son Michael was born, so she dropped the idea of moving to Israel. Victoria married a Jew named Zaretskiy, but she divorced him in 1976. I retired in 1975 to help my daughter look after her son. My grandson, Michael, graduated from the Kiev Medical Institute and works as a medical expert at the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Our son, Boris, followed into his father's footsteps. After finishing school in 1974 he entered the Faculty of Architecture at the Kiev Art Institute and graduated from it with success. He married a very nice, though non-Jewish, girl. They have a daughter, Elena. She is a 4th year student at the Kiev Art Academy. They don't observe any Jewish traditions.

My mother died in Kuibyshev in 1971. She was a receptionist at the local polyclinic. I went to her funeral.

My sister, Manya, finished a secondary school in Kuibyshev and graduated from the Medical Institute in Novosibirsk. She got married and had a daughter, Tatiana. She was a doctor at a hospital in Novosibirsk. Manya's husband died in a train accident in the 1970s. Manya and her daughter moved to Israel in the 1990s. We correspond with them.

My younger sister, Asia, got married when she was 16. She had a daughter, Ludmila. Asia finished the Medical School in Kuibyshev and worked as a medical nurse at the local hospital. She is retired

and lives in Kuibyshev now. She is divorced. Her husband left Asia for another woman.

My husband died in 1986. He was an outstanding architect and wrote many books on architecture. He died when he was working on his doctor's thesis. I married my old acquaintance, Leon Rubashevskiy, in 1992. His wife had died and he felt very lonely. We decided to live together. My second husband died in 2001. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev.

In the early 1990s the USSR disintegrated. The Communist Party was dissolved. Neither my husband nor I were members of the Communist Party. We despised party activists because we believed that no talented person could get involved with party activities. I was very enthusiastic about the changes. It brought freedom of speech. One could speak his mind without fearing to be arrested for telling an anecdote that might be out of place. Even though the standards of living sank in the 1990s and prices went up, I wouldn't like the Soviet power to return.

However, I felt sorry about the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It's annoying that we are considered to be citizens of different countries when going to Russia to visit friends. Take the crossing of the border, for instance, where customs officers check your luggage looking for pieces of sausage or pork fat because there is a ban on taking food products out of Ukraine. That's something we are not used to, and I find it humiliating. I don't travel, but my children and friends face this problem.

I was very enthusiastic about the restoration of Jewish life in the 1990s. I take part in many activities. I worked as volunteer with Hesed for a long time. I'm one of the most active members of the intellectual club in Hesed and attend the Sholem Aleichem 12 Association in Kiev. Besides, I like to attend concerts and performances. I read Jewish newspapers published in Ukraine. I'm not leaving my country for Israel or any other place. My children and grandchildren want to stay here, and I cannot and do not want to live in another country.

Glossary

1 Gangs
During the Civil War in 1918-1920 there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

2 Babi Yar
Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

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 Great Patriotic War

On 22 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.

5 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.

6 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.

7 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.

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 Forced deportation to Siberia

Stalin introduced the deportation of Middle Asian people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

10 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. 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, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

11 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'.

12 Sholem Aleichem, real name was 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.