Roman Barskiy

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Kiev
Ukraine
Interviewer: Ella Orlikova

Family background

My mother's mother, Freida Borschevskaya, nee Rutenberg, was born in Romny, Poltava province, in 1888. Romny was a small town. There were a few Jewish families of doctors, pharmacists, merchants and very skilled handicraftsmen. They were patriarchal families that observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. Freida Borschevskaya's family was one of these. They spoke Yiddish and knew Russian and Ukrainian. Their children received excellent education in the universities of the Russian empire. Theirs was a religious family. My grandmother's father went to the synagogue in Romny on holidays. They always celebrated Sabbath in the family. My grandmother also followed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays, although she was only moderately religious. My grandmother was the last child in a large and rather wealthy family. The youngest children were traditionally raised in the families of the older children. This made it easier to give the other children good education.

My grandmother got a very good education. She finished grammar school. She was a very beautiful woman. Even in her 50s she was still attractive. My grandmother was raised in the family of her older sister Bella, and she grew up with her nephew. That was why of all her brothers and sisters she only remembered Bella and her family.

Bella's son Boris was born in 1894. Bella's marriage name was Ponarovskaya. Hers was a wealthy family. I believe Isaak Ponarovskiy, Bella's husband, was a tradesman, a respectable man in the town. My grandmother always maintained good family relationships with her cousin Boris Ponarovskiy. He was an economist in Moscow. He died in

1989. Boris's son became a musician and his granddaughter Irina Ponarovskaya became a popular pop singer in USSR. Women had traditionally been housewives in such families as Ponarovskiy.

In 1904, when she was 16, my grandmother married Peisah Kazakov. My grandfather had two brothers. Gilel, born in 1875, graduated from the medical faculty of Kiev University. He worked as a doctor in Nezhyn; his daughter Elena taught physics at the Pedagogical Institute in Nezhyn. She was single and died in 1991 at the age of 76. My grandfather's brother Emmanuel was a doctor in the province of Poltava. Emmanuel's son Mikhail (1897-1954) was a writer. He was the author of the novel Empire's End. This book about the events before the revolution of 1917 was popular in the USSR in 1930s. It described the processes of ruination of patriarchal foundations of different levels of the society and of the way of life of various parts of the society, including Jewish. His son Mikhail Kazakov is a famous Russian actor and producer.

My grandmother had a real Jewish wedding. The bridegroom was a man of standing at that time and the bride was an educated girl for that time - she had finished 5 classes at the grammar school by then. All famous Jews of Lubny came to their wedding. The chief rabbi, Warshavskiy, led them to the huppah, and musicians from Kiev played at the wedding. The best Jewish cooks made kosher food. People remembered the wedding for many years.

My grandmother became a member of the Kazakov family. They were very religious and observed all Jewish traditions. My great-grandfather Ruvim Kazakov owned a post office in Lubny. He must have made good money, as he was a wealthy man. He gave all his children, except my grandfather, a good education. My grandfather was to inherit his father's business. It was customary for an older brother to work in the family business and earn money for other brothers' education.

Lubny was a larger town. The post office was located in the center. My mother and I visited my grandfather in Lubny before the war. He and his second wife Maria lived in a big brick house, with the stables and sheds where my grandfather kept wagons. There were horses even before the war in 1940. I was five years old and I remember my grandfather putting me on the horseback to have a ride in the yard. I look like my grandfather. He was tall and gray-haired. My grandfather was a handsome man. My grandmother said that my great-grandfather Ruvim was even more handsomemy grandmother said. My great-grandfather Ruvim had a beard. My grandfather didn't. My great grandfather Ruvim had a beard. My great grandfather and my grandfather wore a little cap. Now I know that it was a kipah. My grandfather spoke Yiddish at home. He

also knew Russian and Ukrainian. He had Ukrainian employees in the post office and he communicated with them in Ukrainian.

There was an inn near the post office that also belonged to my grandfather. He had a cook there to make meals. He also had a Jewish cook at home that made meals for the family following all kashruth rules. My grandfather was a religious man and demanded that all Jewish traditions were observed in his family. ::::::::::::::

The Kazakovs had two daughters. The older daughter died in her infancy. The second daughter, Bertha, born in 1909, was my mother. We have kept excerpts from the registries of all Jews born in Lubny with Rabbi Warshavskiy's signature.

Then a romantic story happened in the family. My grandfather's close relative Boruh Zelman Borschevskiy came to Lubny after graduating from the law department at the University in St. Petersburg. My grandmother fell in love with him at first sight and he did with her. It was a great love. As my grandmother was dying at the age of 102, her last words were "Zelman, Zelman, I'm coming to you." She died almost 50 years after Zelman did.

My grandmother insisted on getting a divorce. Rabbi Warshavskiy stamped his feet, yelling, "I can't, because I've never heard you arguing." At that time it was next to impossible to get a divorce, but my grandmother managed to convince my grandfather to divorce her. Zelman Borchevskiy forgot about his dream to enter the medical faculty at the Warsaw University. He took my grandmother to St. Petersburg. In order to obtain a permit for my grandmother to live beyond the boundaries of her residential area, he took her to Kronstadt, a fortress on an island near St. Petersburg. (In Tsarist Russia, the Jewish population was only allowed to live in certain areas. In Kiev, Jews were allowed to live in Podol, the lower and poorer part of the city.) In Kronstadt the rabbi of the Baltic Navy married them for 100 rubles. There were no friends or relatives at their wedding. The rabbi said the prayer under the huppah and issued their certificate. And my grandmother obtained the residential permit as a wife of a Jew with a higher education.

Her daughter, my mother, was raised by her father Peisach Kazakov in Lubny, because her mother was going to start a new life and her father thought that it was better for her to stay at home and in familiar surroundings.

There was a small number of Jews that observed Jewish traditions in St. Petersburg, but my grandmother observed them very strictly. Even after the war when she was living with us she knewYiddish all holidays

and traditions, always wore a shawl and lit candles at Sabbath, although she spoke, thought and read in Russian, and was a woman of the world. I don't remember her praying, but she observed all the rituals. Her second husband Zelman Borschevskiy had a higher education and added much to my grandmother's education.

After the October Revolution of 1917 when the famine began in St. Petersburg, my grandmother and her husband Zalman moved to Kiev. (After WWI, St. Petersburg, the former capital of the Russian Empire, was cut off from food supplies and actually blocked. Food industries were impacted by the general chaos and long war in the country.) They rented an apartment in the center of the city. During the civil war of 1916-1919, the regime changed 11 times in the city: the Reds (the Soviet Army), the Whites (fighting for the Russian monarchy), and the Greens (a well-known ataman, a leader of robbers and bandits, was nicknamed Zeleniy, Russian for "green")-all took it several times.

I asked my grandmother about pogroms and she said "I guess there were some in Podol, but I didn't know for sure."

"Did they happen when Denikin units were in town?" I asked. General Deniken led a counter-revolutionary gang of White Guards, famous for their brigandage and their anti-Semitic actions all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

"I don't know," my grandmother said, "Denikin officers were polite and saluted me in the streets."

The pogroms happened in Jewish neighborhoods. My grandmother was a beautiful, well-dressed, noble woman. However, she always remembered her identity and was a Jew to the marrow of her bones. When I asked her about the Bolsheviks, she called them bandits. The Bolsheviks threw her family out of its house in 1918. The house was siezed to become the Revolutionary Military Council office. The Bolsheviks took away all the people's possessions. She saw them shaking chandeliers where people had hidden their diamonds, and the diamonds falling from there. However, they didn't throw her out of the house. Men were always impressed by her beauty and manners. She told me that they gave her a ring and earrings, which she exchanged for a quart of milk and half loaf of bread during the blockade. After the civil war they returned to Leningrad where her husband died.

My grandfather Peisach Kazakov got married to Maria, a Jewish girl. I don't remember her well. They had two children. My aunt Anna, born in 1922, entered Kiev Medical Institute. When she was a student she often visited us. She read me fairy tales in German and translated them for me. Anna went to the evacuation with the Medical Institute, graduated

from it and went to the front. She married a Russian officer from Siberia named Yukechev. They went to Novosibirsk after the war. They have two sons: one is a journalist and the other is a musician.

Anna died in Novosibirsk in 2001. I correspond with her sons. Her brother Ruvim was in evacuation in Saratov with his parents. He stayed there after the war and worked as an economist. During the war he worked at the aviation plant.

My grandfather Kazakov had a big house and a big family in Lubny. Even during the difficult times of revolution their family was all right. They earned their living by providing wagons and wagon drivers for transportation. My mother Bertha was raised in this family until she finished school. However religious her family was, they didn't impose their beliefs on her. She could have a meal with wagon drivers; and in general she wasn't raised according to the Jewish rules. But still my mother knew Yiddish well. My grandfather was kind to her, though her stepmother didn't care much for the girl. My grandmother visited her, and my mother went to see them in Petersburg. The families were on friendly terms.

In 1923 my grandmother's son Boris Borschevskiy was born in Petersburg. He finished school in 1941. He was a talented young man, but he starved to death in 1942 during the blockade of Leningrad. My grandmother was sorry that he hadn't gone to the front as a volunteer. She said that he would at least have gotten some food there. Her husband Zelman Boruh Borschevskiy also perished at that time. He was Financial Director at the Skorokhod shoe factory.

My mother finished labor school in Lubny in 1928. She was a typist. Later she left for Kharkov. Kharkov was the capital of Ukraine until 1934. My mother got a worked as a typist at some company. In Kharkov she met her future husband.

My father Israil Barskiy was born in Lubny, Poltava province, in 1907. I also have an excerpt from the birth registry. This excerpt states that the circumcision was done on the 8th day after his birth, according to the rules. This document was also signed by Rabbi Warshavskiy. My father never told me about his family and I don't know anything about my grandfather. My grandfather Perets Barskiy died in 1933, before I was born.

I remember my grandmother Tsypa Barskaya, born in 1876. She knew Yiddish very well, it was her mother tongue. She was a very nice and kind woman. We visited my grandparents before the war. She was a very sweet Jewish grandmother. She was a religious woman. She observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated holidays and prayed at home. The

synagogues were closed at that time. (In those years it was not safe to go to the synagogue. Those were the horrific 1930s, the period of struggle against religion. There was only one synagogue left of the 300 existing in Kiev before the revolution of 1917. Religious buildings were removed; rabbis and Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind the KGB [State Security Committee] walls.)

We usually visited my grandparents in the summer. I don't remember any of their celebrations. I have very sweet memories of staying with them. Their house seemed huge to me. There was a big garden near the house.

My father's older sister Henrietta (her name in marriage was Litovt), born in 1904, lived in Kharkov for a long time. Her first husband perished during the war. She got married for the second time in Leningrad. She was an economist. Her daughter Elena, born in 1939, is my cousin. Elena, her husband, and their two children emigrated to Israel after Henrietta died in 1990.

My father's younger brother Iosif, born in 1912, was killed at the front in 1942. He never married.

I believe my father's family was rich. Many of them received higher education in St. Petersburg. I only know that my father's cousin Raya Granat was a lecturer on strength of materials in the Mozhayskiy Academy in Leningrad. His other cousin Anna, I believe, was married to the academician Luriye.

My father didn't like to talk about his childhood. I know that he finished the rabfak (an educational institution for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet authorities). He was good at painting and he went to Moscow to study at the Art Institute. Later, when the Art Institute was opened in Ukraine, my father got transferred to Kharkov Art Institute. He graduated as an architect in 1934.

Young people in Kharkov gathered in groups of people from the same areas. They remained friends for the rest of their lives supporting each other regardless of their nationalities or ethnicity. My parents met in one of these groups. A Jewish wedding was out of the question in 1934. Although they were not Komsomol members, young people of their time believed that it was enough to register a marriage at the registry office and get a stamp in the passport.

Growing up

My father received a room in a communal apartment. He worked a lot at the design Institute and my mother went to Leningrad before I was born

to have my grandmother help her to look after the baby. They wanted to call me Ruvim after my great-grandfather, but changed their mind at the last moment and named me Roman. Roman was a more fashionable name at the time. I was born in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) on August 2, 1935.

In 1934 the Ukrainian government moved to Kiev. Voenproject, where my father worked, also moved to Kiev in 1935. My mother came to Kiev from Leningrad and we settled down in a big communal apartment in 2 Pushkinskaya Street. The nobleman Rusakov, the former owner of this apartment, also lived in one of the rooms. He was an engineer and he socialized with my father. The rest of the tenants were a worker, two clerks, and a single mother and her son, who was a timorous, thievish teenager. We often visited Rusakov in his room. Later we were told that he left with Germans in 1943.

Ethnicity didn't matter in those days. My parents were young and progressive and didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays that were considered to be vestiges of the past. My father and mother could exchange a couple of words in Yiddish, just because they came up at some point. These were the Soviet days when ethnicity was no more important than the color of hair. My father wasn't a member of the Communist Party, but like the majority of people he believed that everything in our country was being done as it should have been.

My father and mother worked a lot. I was at a special kindergarten of the "Communist" plant and the Writers' Union. It was located in a big orchard. There were lots of toys. I remember a party in 1939 when the Soviet army entered Western Ukraine. The boys dressed up as tank men, pilots, and cavalry men. We were happy, and recited poems dedicated to Stalin under a big portrait of him. We believed that Stalin heard us.

During the war

On July 22, 1940, my sister Elena was born. At the beginning of the war she was 11 months old.

I clearly remember the first and each following day of the 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-named Great Patriotic War.) In the previous years, the kindergarten moved to the country house in Ostyor, about 90 kilometers from Kiev. But in 1941 we were staying in town for some reason. The children woke up to the roar of bombing. I was 6 years old and was a senior in my group. I remember evacuation. My father put us on a truck heading to Kharkov. We only had one suitcase with us and my mother was holding my sister. Somewhere near Poltava we were attacked by a Messerschmitt, a

powerful German fighter plane. It imprinted in my memory. The plane flew so low that I could see the face of the pilot. He looked out of the window and saw that there were no soldiers, just women and children, and he flew away. He turned out to be a decent man even though he was a German. I realized that it was a war from the first day.

Many people stayed in Kiev, remembering the Germans during WWI. I had asked my grandmother about the civil war and revolution and what time was best for the people. She replied that it was best when Germans were in power. They were cultured people and there were no pogroms. People didn't believe that the nation of Schiller, Goethe and Heine could be so wild. I understand those Jews that stayed in Kiev and even waited for Germans to come. They didn't believe that Germans would shoot them just for being Jews.

There was no anti-Semitism at the beginning of the war. It is my understanding that it started after Germans began to separate Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners-of-war.

We didn't stay long in Kharkov. My mother went to work as a typist at Kharkov Military Headquarters. In Kharkov we stayed at my grandmother Tsypa's house. She looked after Elena. We didn't stay long in Kharkov. Later my grandmother and my aunt and my cousin evacuated. My aunt's husband went to the front and was killed there. When Germans were approaching Kharkov we moved on to Kuibyshev. On the way I saw bombings and destroyed cars, people who had been killed, and blood.

We reached Kuibyshev, but there was no place to stay there and we sailed on a steamship from one town to another, I don't remember their names, looking for a place to stay. It was a boat with paddle wheels, of pre-revolutionary make. It was September and October, 1941. We settled down in Stavropol-on-the-Volga (Toliatti at present). I remember a lot of mud, and black houses. It looked prehistoric.

We received a letter from my father. He wrote that he was going on business to Kuibyshev and that we could meet there. We caught the last boat, as the Volga was beginning to freeze. It was cold when we arrived in Kuibyshev and it was beginning to snow. We went up the street to catch a tram. My mother was carrying Lena and I was holding her by the skirt. My mother was crying and I was freezing. We came to the railway station and found my father's note on a bulletin board. So we went on to Tashkent, a warm, cozy town very far away.

My father went to the army in Kiev. I remember him wearing his uniform of a private. He served in the engineering unit at the southwestern front. He had previous military construction experience and was sent

to the southern border with Iran to a construction site. He and mother agreed that my mother would be writing to him poste restante to Moscow so that he could find us. He came to us to Kuibyshev on vacation in October 1941.

We went to Kizilarvat, a station at the Krasnovodsk-Tashkent railroad in the Karadag foothills where my father had his job assignment. There was a Russian village for the railroad employees. We rented a room from a Russian family. The host of the family was a locksmith at the depot. He had three sons. The boys were very handy like their father. There was a locksmith shop in the yard and I spent most of my time there. The boys, the youngest of whom was in the 5th form, explained everything to me. My father worked most of the time. They were building something there. The government was going to send troops to Iran. My mother worked as a typist at the hospital.

1942 was a terrible year of famine. The boys and I went to the foothills to dig out tulip bulbs. We ate them. I also tried a turtle. We made soup and the meat tasted like chicken. The boys also ate hedgehogs, but I couldn't. My older friend's name was Zhora. The younger one, Vova, went to the 10th form. He went into the army in 1943 and died. People sympathized with us. There were other families in the evacuation. I understood the importance of water there. It was where the Kara-Kum desert began. Everything looked heavenly when it was watered. There I realized that I was a Jew. Someone called me a "zhyd". I don't remember why. My parents explained to me about the Jews and about our identity. I learned to play babki - sheep bones, an ancient game. I was responsible for getting bread from the store. I remember a terrible incident when I gave the day's ration of bread to a boy and he promised to give me babki. When my mother asked me about the bread I told her the truth. She didn't beat me, she only said "He won't give you anything." And he didn't. I remember this first lie in my life. I remembered for the rest of my life that not all people could be trusted.

Then there was the first time I realized that I was a Jew. Someone called me a "zhyd." I don't remember why. My parents explained to me about the Jews and about our identity.

I went to the Russian secondary school, but I attended it for only about 3 weeks. There was no food to give me and my mother sent me to the kindergarten at the military base. I had to get up at 4 AM and walk by myself about 4 km across a ravine and a stream. I remember the food we received: toasted bread and porridge. There were no comforts there. It was just a building in the middle of the steppe and we had to go to the toilet outside. There was a military aerodrome

with one plane left. The rest of the planes had been sent to the front.

In 1943 my father was transferred to another military unit in Semipalatinsk. We lived there in a big wooden house and the toilet was outside.

My mother continued working. By that time my grandmother Freida from Leningrad joined us. She was looking after my sister and me. We stayed there until 1944. The neighbors' boys teased me more than once for being a Jew. Once I even injured the nose of one of them. My mother told me off then. She said I couldn't beat someone because he didn't understand.

My grandmother was very thin after she came to live with us. She stayed with us until she died. She introduced Jewish identity into our family, which we didn't have. She spoke Yiddish to my father and mother. She celebrated all Jewish holidays and cooked traditional food. She fasted at Yom Kippur and never ate bread at Pesach. She made her own matzo. At Hanukkah she always found small change to give it to the children and she insisted that we observed all these traditions. After the war she made more traditional food: gefillte fish, etc. She was a very good cook. She told me that she had learned cooking from my grandfather Kazakov's cook. I learned cooking from her and I always make my own meals.

In April 1944, we returned to Kiev. During our trip back, we saw a stunning battlefield near Voronezh with a lot of damaged equipment. The Darnitsa station near Kiev had been destroyed by German bombings. We went to the Jewish bazaar when we arrived in Kiev. There was everything there! My mother bought me a pie with beans and it was such a delicacy! There had never been enough food in the evacuation. And there was so much of everything at the bazaar. They were selling borscht (beet soup) with sour cream, stew, et cetera. and I went to school to finish the first form. There were many Jewish children in my class and we were friends.
I remember our trip back to Kiev, a stunning battlefield near Voronezh with a lot of damaged equipment. The Darnitsa station near Kiev was destroyed by German bombings. We went in the direction of the Jewish bazaar when we arrived in Kiev. There was everything there! My mother bought me a pie with beans and it was such a delicacy! There was never enough food in the evacuation. And there was so much of everything at the bazaar. They were selling borsch with sour cream (beetroot vegetable soup), a stew, etc.

I heard about Babi Yar when we were in evacuation. (Babi Yar is the site of the mass shootings of Kiev's Jewish population, which was

done in the open by the Germans on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev. During 3 years of occupation, 1941-1943, Germans killed thousands of people at Babi Yar : communists, partisans, prisoners of war). My mother received a letter from our former neighbors in 1944 after Kiev was liberated. They described the horrific things that had happened. My first visit was to Babi Yar, the place where they were shooting people. I saw embers there. I was 9. The children growing up during the war are older than their calendar age. I knew and understood everything. I went to Babi Yar with a Jewish boy. I remember burnt bones on the slopes. We found rusty keys from someone's apartment.

I knew well which of our acquaintances were alive and which perished. We came to the ruins of our house and there on the entrance door that was intact we saw notes from survivors with their contact information. Our neighbors told us about my mother's friend. She stayed in Kiev, but she didn't go to Babi Yar. We also knew who reported her to the Germans. Her husband was Ukrainian. He went to the front. Her neighbor kept blackmailing her threatening that she would give here away to the Germans. At last she didn't have anything to give her but her husband's leather coat. She tried to explain that she wanted to keep it for her husband, but the neighbor didn't want to give up. She reported on her and Germans took her to Babi Yar. A life for a leather coat.

We received a 5th floor room on Reitarskaya Street. It was the top floor and there was a big hole in the roof. We stayed with a friend of my mother's for some time until we had the roof fixed. This friend, a Ukrainian, came from Lubny. She was a very interesting woman. Her husband was a Jew. He perished in 1937 when the KGB eliminated the leading Party officials. She returned from evacuation. Her son was with his grandmother in a village. He survived miraculously. His grandmother's neighbors pointed fingers at him saying "This is a Judah. He is a Jewish child." But his grandmother managed to save him. She was my parents' friend for life.

My father continued to work at the Kiev project organization. In 1943 he entered the Communist Party. However strange it may sound, he believed in the idea of communism. He was very naïve in this respect. Later, when I sneered at him about it, he got very angry at me and said if it were not for the Soviet regime I wouldn't even have shoes. I reminded him that his relatives had higher education before the war and they did have shoes.

We lived in a communal apartment with nine other families. 39 people, one toilet and one sink. There were many children in the apartment and we were friends. There were Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian and one Polish

family in the apartment. We didn't always get along. The five of us - my grandmother, my parents, Elena and I - lived in a 14 square meter room. We didn't have running water. I used to fetch water from Bolshaya Zhytomirskaya Street, quite a long way. There was no heating, so I cut wood to take it to the 5th floor. We made a stove with a smokestack through the window. My grandmother cooked on this stove. The rats were as big as kittens. There was no furniture except two old and shabby beds tied together with a wire. I slept on the chairs. My sister slept on a box. When my parents' friends began to return from evacuation they stayed with us until they found a place to live. We got gas and running water in 1947.

Post-war

I became a pioneer in the 3rd form in 1947. I didn't take it seriously. I attended pioneer meetings, but I didn't care about them. I enjoyed playing football with other boys and swimming in the Dnieper in summer. I read a lot. I read books by Sholem Alechem in Russian at home. (Sholem Alechem, whose real name was Shalom Nohumovich Rabinovich, was a Jewish writer who lived in Ukraineand moved to the USA in 1914.)

We had classic Russian and foreign books and historical books at home. I read Tevye the Milkman and Motl Boy. I became a Komsomol member because it was mandatory in order to enter a higher educational institution in the future and make a career. (Komsomol was a Communist youth organization created by the Communist Party to make sure that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.) The authorities were suspicious of young people who were not Komsomol members. I wasn't an enthusiastic Komsomol member, but after I entered, no one could bother me.

I remember how the attitude towards Jews changed in 1948. When the authorities started arresting the Jewish anti-fascist committee in Moscow, we could hear all kinds of things in the streets like "Hitler didn't kill enough of you," or "It's a pity he didn't kill all of you." The Doctors' Plot worsened the situation. (The so-called Doctors' Plot was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital, charging them with the murder of leading Bolsheviks. The case was started in 1952 but was never finished because Stalin died the next year.)

We had very decent teachers. I remember Vasiliy Dubovik, the teacher of mathematics. He was a very orderly and reserved man. Later I learned that he participated in the Ukrainian nationalist movement. I

remembered him from my first days at school. He wore high boots and black trousers tucked in the boots and a Ukrainian embroidered shirt. He was a typical Ukrainian. He was very kind and never segregated children by their ethnicity. I learned from him to be precise, to express my thoughts clearly, and to be logical. There was no anti-Semitism at school, but there was outside. We all knew that it was difficult for a Jew to enter an Institute.

My grandmother understood very well what was going on. She used to say "I knew that these bandits would come to this." My father was very concerned. Actually his ideals were falling down. My mother was also disappointed. After the war she worked at the Ministry of Home Affairs office. She was paid well and had a rank of an officer. In 1949 she had to quit her job because she was a Jew. She was a highly skilled typist. She went to work at Kiev Project where my father worked and later was employed by the Soviet Telegraph Agency of Ukraine.

I finished school in 1953. I tried to enter Kiev Polytechnic Institute, but it was impossible for a Jew to study there. The situation at home also was difficult. I understood that I had to leave. There was too little space for all of us and my sister was growing up. I heard that they were opening a new Institute of Railroad Transport Engineers in Gomel, Byelorussia, and I went there. When I arrived, the entrance exams were over. I went to the hostel and began to live there.

One day a captain from a military college came to the hostel and suggested that I entered their college. I agreed. There was another Jewish boy, Leonid Kogan from Chernobyl. He joined me. He lives in New York now. We are still friends and write letters.

It was a radio engineering college. I didn't tell my parents that I went to Gomel. I came back home to pick up my clothing. My grandmother said "Good boy, independent." My parents didn't mind it either.

Stalin died in 1953. I didn't care. People around were crying, but I didn't have any feeling for him.

There was no anti-Semitism at college. There were five Jews. I lived in the barracks for three years. The barrack had hectares of floors to be cleaned, bunk beds to be made. We got poor meals and studied studied. My assignment was at the Far East air-defense headquarters. From Headquarters, I was sent to Komsomolsk-on-the Amur (Far East) and from there to the post in Nizhnetambovsk, a big village up the Amur.

I was the only Jew in the unit.. We all got along well. We built our houses from bricks removed from the former camp facilities. The camps

had been closed by then. This was in 1956. I served as operations orderly. My responsibility was to monitor planes in the sky, some of which were not our planes. I served five years in the army. When I was offered the chance to demobilize, I took it.

I returned to Kiev, to the two-room apartment that my parents had received. It was 1958 and I felt a totally different attitude towards Jews. I tried everywhere, but couldn't find a job, although I was an ex-military man and had some privileges. My mother mentioned to her colleagues in the radio agency that I couldn't find a job for half a year and one of them helped me to get a job as a locksmith rigger apprentice at the Tochelectropribor Plant. I met my best friends there: Iosif Fredzon, a veteran; Yuri Alexandrov, a veteran; Vova Yerzhakovskiy, a war orphan and a former sailor. They were on my crew.

In five years this whole crew went to work at the Kievpribor Plant. This plant was switching to the manufacture of space equipment. We sent Vova to negotiate our employment - he was of Slavic origin. We were highly skilled workers and they hired us. They didn't question our ethnicity. I mentioned to the Human Resources manager that there were two Jews in this crew. He told me to take it easy and said that he would make all necessary arrangements. The director approved our employment.

In 1959 I met my future wife at the first American economic exhibition in USSR, in Moscow. I had come to Moscow to enter the Polytechnic Institute. I tried to enter Kiev Polytechnic Institute, but failed. I passed all exams in Moscow Communications Institute with the highest grades. I was admitted as an extramural student.

I was having a good time attending art and industrial exhibitions when I met Cleopatra Pochezyorskaya. She was a student of Leningrad Engineering Construction Institute and was visiting Moscow. She had been born in 1934. She wasn't a Jew. Her mother came from a noble family. She worked at a bank. Cleopatra had another year to study at the Institute. We got married in 1960 after she graduated from the Institute. My parents, and especially my grandmother, didn't approve of my marriage. They didn't like it that she wasn't a Jew. They thought that she might be arrogant and didn't want to accept her. We just visited them sometimes. We rented a room from an elderly Jewish couple. In two years my parents received a new apartment and we moved into their apartment.

Our daughter Valeria was born in 1963. She wasn't raised as a Jew. My wife didn't want my grandmother to speak Yiddish in her presence. She always emphasized that she came from a Russian family. I tried to

avoid any conflicts. I'm an agreeable man and never impose my views on people.

I continued my studies and went to Moscow to take exams after each academic term. I worked as an engineer at the Kievpribor Plant. The plant began to manufacture space equipment for manned spaceships Vostok, Mir, Soyuz and Progress. I made many parts of the equipment with my own hands. I often went on business trips. I visited Baikonur and Plisetskaya, two Soviet space centers. I was very fond of my work. In 1960s and 1970s, the development of space studies was very popular and we were proud of being involved in this great project.

My family life wasn't a success. My wife and I didn't get along and divorced in 1974. I don't think that my ethnicity was the cause of divorce. We were just different people. We didn't understand each other and didn't take one another into consideration. I kept in touch with my daughter and supported her. I received this one-room apartment from the plant.

I tried to write in the 1970s, and was a success. I write stories and novels. My friends like them. I have always been interested in Jewish subjects. I learned Polish to read books about WWII and the Holocaust. At that time no books about Jews were published in the Soviet Union. There are always Jewish characters in my books. There is even a camel that is a Jew in one of my stories. My father was the first reader of my stories. He worked at the Voenproject organization until he died from ischemia in 1978. He had the third heart attack. He fell in the street and died instantly.

My mother took some additional typing work home after she retired. My sister Elena graduated from the faculty of mathematics at Kiev University. She married Yuri Bochkaryov, a non-Jewish artist-designer. They had a son, Mikhail.

My sister is a talented woman. She worked at the computer center. In 1991 they moved to Israel and my mother went with them. She was very ill and died in 1993. She is buried in Israel, our ancestors' land.

My grandmother lived happily 102 years. She died in 1990. Until her last moment she was totally lucid and had a clear memory. She was interested in everything and she drank a toast of cognac at her 100th birthday. She was interested in politics and sports. She knew all Kiev Dynamo football players and watched their games on TV, commenting on them. She always remembered all Jewish traditions. She fasted at Yom Kippur, and we bought matzo at Pesach for her. However, after the war she didn't celebrate other holidays, didn't go to the synagogue and didn't cover her head. Two days before she died she had a fever

and she fell into unconsciousness. In some time she came to her senses, looked at me with her blue eyes that had once startled Denikin officers, and said "Zalman, I'm coming". She closed her eyes. It was evening. My sister stayed at her bedside. She called me at night and said that our grandmother had gone.

My daughter Valeria graduated from Kiev Art Institute in 1989. She married her tutor when she was a student, but soon divorced him. In 1988 her son Dmitriy was born. In 1992 my daughter went to visit her acquaintances in the US and stayed there. Soon my ex-wife Cleopatra went there with little Dmitriy. I don't hear from them. Unfortunately, they both are the kind of people who only care about someone as long as they are in need of him.

I have visited my sister in Israel twice. My friends Mark Shehman, Alexandr Zaslavskiy, Boris Smolkin, and Wainshtein showed me Israel. I admired the people who managed to build up their country. Their effort is worth deep respect. I didn't notice any ethnic hostility or anything like this. I understand that what is happening there is in the interest of a bunch of bandits. It is hard to imagine what these bandits do to the country. They are not human if they enjoy seeing somebody of different faith dying regardless of whether it is a woman, a man, an old man or a child. It is too late for me to move there. I won't be able to learn the language, but if I have to fight there I will go. If they need my help I will go there regardless of whether I know the language or I don't.

Anti-Semitism is like a deep-seated disease. It's like a tuberculosis bacillus. I think that it has always existed, but it gets activated at the turning points of history and tragically impacts Jews and Ukrainians. Anti-Semitism has always been a tragedy for the people who have expressed it.

There is now no anti-Semitism on the state level, as there used to be during the Soviet regime. I feel nothing but respect towards me. I still go to work. I have worked almost 50 years for this country, but my pension is not enough to make my living. That's why I have to go to work. If I lose this job I can't imagine how I can make ends meet. The so-called pension is very small.

I'm attached to this land very much. My ancestors have shed lots of blood and worked so hard for this land. I have always identified myself as a Jew and never concealed my ethnicity. But I've always treated people with respect and they reciprocated my respect. There are many opportunities to study Jewish history and read Jewish books now. I read Yegupets and other Jewish newspapers and magazines. I visit Chesed, the Jewish charity organization, and I recall all Jewish

holidays thanks to them. I don't celebrate them, but I remember.

I'm not a religious person but I believe in a rational extraterrestrial energy. Jews do not say the word God. They clearly understand that one can call this extraterrestrial energy anything but "God." I believe in it. Standing by the Wailing Wall in 2002, I felt that it is a special spot. I pressed my forehead to the wall, laid my hands on it and thought about my friends and my family, asking for health and prosperity to my friends and family, and I felt some kind of relief.