Sima Shvarts

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Kiev
Ukraine
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My name is Sima Markovna Shvarts. I also have a Jewish patronymic - Yankel- Mordkovna Shvarts. I was born in the town of Rzhischev, Kiev region, on 19th January 1914.

My mother's parents, my maternal grandparents, were Ilya and Chaya Vainstein. Grandfather Ilya was a teacher. He died before my birth, but my mother told me a lot about him. He was a highly educated man, but I don't know what institution he finished. I know that he taught grammar and arithmetic. My mother said that my grandfather also knew French. At their house he had a special big room equipped for teaching children. There was a big wooden table. Children would come, sit around that table, and grandfather would sit at the head of the table. This is how he taught. During the break, grandmother would give them something to eat, then they rested, and then grandfather would continue teaching. He taught in Yiddish. Grandfather was totally involved in his teaching work. He gathered poor Jewish children from his town; he found around 30 of them. He taught them free of charge. I can't even tell you exactly where the family got money from - my mother never discussed this question with me.

My grandfather died unexpectedly in 1912. At that time his children already lived in different cities: in, Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, and Zhitomir. On Passover grandfather always invited all of his children to his house, both married and single ones. On the day he died they also came to his house, and the house was richly decorated by my grandmother. The whole town went to see how Ilya's children came to visit him. So, everything went wonderfully during the day. That night they all went to bed, and grandfather had a stroke and died. Grandmother Chaya was a housewife: she cooked, cleaned the house, took care of the children and kept order.

They had seven children: one son and six daughters. I don't remember when they were born, but I can name them all. The eldest daughter was Etya, then came their son Naum, then Dvoira, then my mother, Risl, then Chaika, Rakhil, and Fruma.

At that time, even though our family was not rich, none of the women worked outside the house. When they got married, their husbands provided for them. The year before my birth, only two elder sisters and the brother was married. Those who were younger than my mother were still single. They were seamstresses. Two of them lived in Dnepropetrovsk and one in Kiev.

My mother Risya Shvarts was born in Rzhischev in 1885. She only completed a Jewish junior school. Her family was very poor and didn't have the money to pay for the education of their children. Besides, my mother had to help grandmother with the housework and take care of her younger sisters. Later, when she got married, she couldn't study because she was busy. I was born in 1914 and my father was called up to the army at the beginning of World War I.

My father, Yankel-Mordko Shvarts, was born in Rzhischev in 1883. I never knew my father because he was killed in the war. I know that he worked as a roofer. I still have a silver spoon that he once brought for me. Once when he was working on the roof of a house, he found this spoon in the attic. He brought it home and said: 'Our little daughter should eat only from this spoon until she grows up'. So, I still have this spoon.

My parents got married in 1913. They lived together for only one year. When the war broke out, my father was called up to the army and stayed in Rzhischev for some time. He was wearing the army uniform, but had a chance to see his friends and wife. I have some pictures of him from that period. Later, when he was sent to the front, he wrote to my mother, but then his letters stopped coming and he didn't return from the war.

In Rzhischev we lived in my mother's parents' house. I can vaguely remember that house because I was only four years old in 1918, when we moved to Kiev. I remember that there was one big room and two bedrooms. As I mentioned before, grandfather used the big room to teach children. There was also an attic where they kept winter clothes and shoes, as well as the kosher kitchen utensils [for Passover].

According to my mother's stories, my grandparents were very religious and strictly observed the kashrut, Jewish traditions and holidays. But I don't remember any of these things. I know only that on holidays, especially on Passover, grandfather tried to get all his family together under the roof of his own house.

My father's parents had a better life financially than my mother's parents. My father's father owned a business that dealt with the loading and unloading of goods to and from ships that docked in Rzhischev. Grandfather's name was Mordko Shvarts, and grandmother's name was Rakhil Shvarts.

My father was the eldest child in the family. He had brothers, Ruvim and Naum, then a sister Manya, then brothers Shmilek and Menachem, and then sisters Etya and Liza. I am not sure if they were born exactly in this order, but I think so. The brothers helped their father in his business. They also had a store and sold things there. Women certainly didn't work outside the house. Before getting married they helped their mother, and after getting married their husbands provided for them - this was a tradition in all Jewish families.

I remember the house of my father's parents because mother took me there for the summer holidays when we were already living in Kiev. There was a large thoroughfare in Rzhischev that led to the market, and the main square in the town was a market, where all people came together. Grandfather's house stood in a small street right next to that thoroughfare.

I have a photo where all grandfather's grandchildren are together. He gathered all of them for summer holidays. They had a big house with an orchard, and children were delighted to spend their summer holidays there. Of all the children I was the only girl who went to school. The rest were too young, as far as I remember. Grandfather gathered not only his grandchildren, but also his daughters and daughters-in-law, who brought their children to him. There was enough room for everyone.

He had a very good orchard. Grandfather loved us very much, so he allowed us to pick the flowers and eat all the fruit. I remember that we felt wonderful at his house because both grandfather and

grandmother were very kind people.

My father's parents were also religious. They kept the laws of kashrut and always celebrated Sabbath. I remember how grandmother lit candles [on Friday night] and grandfather prayed. When they had to go to the table, he also went to the dining room and prayed there. Even though he taught us to believe in God, we often mocked him and laughed, unfortunately. That is why he would turn his back on us, pray looking in the other direction, then sit at the head of the table with all of us around the table, and grandmother would bring food.

My grandparents always went to the synagogue - it was like a law for them. I know that grandmother said she had to go up to the second floor where all the women prayed, while grandfather stayed on the first floor. I also remember that I told her that it was unfair, that grandmother should stay on the first floor because it was easier for her. And they laughed at me. The synagogue was a sacred place because mostly Jews lived in that town.

Grandfather always wore a yarmulka. He also had a tallit that he put on during the prayer and tefillin that he put on his right hand and head according to the Jewish tradition. My grandmother was rather fat, but very active. She had time to do everything around the house. She wore a wig and sometimes a kerchief because, according to the Jewish tradition, all married women are always supposed to cover their heads.

When I came to visit them in the 1920s, my grandparents no longer worked. Some Ukrainian girls came to help them take care of the garden, the fruit trees and flowers; my grandparents always told them that their grandchildren would come in summer and they would want to 'eat something tasty'.

At that time relations between Ukrainians, Russians and Jews were wonderful. I know it because later in Kiev my mother told me that every time she heard somebody saying the word 'zhyd' [kike], she always said, 'How can they! For so many years we lived with wonderful people, Ukrainians, in Rzhischev. They even said our names in Yiddish.' For, in those times if someone was called Chaim, it was pronounced as Chaim [the Jewish way of saying it], and not as Efim or something else. So, my mother was outraged by the fact that people could change so quickly: you have wonderful relations with someone and suddenly these relations are broken.

The Ukrainians who lived in Rzhischev highly respected the Shvarts family because they were very kind people. Their house was always open to whoever wished to come in. Sometimes old, poor people would come in, and grandmother would never throw them out, no matter what their origin was (Jewish or Gentile). First of all she would feed them at the table. That is why our families were so highly respected in the community.

I remember almost nothing of our life in Rzhischev before we moved to Kiev, but I can vividly remember the Jewish pogrom. Maybe I remember it so well because I was in stress because of the fear. One night, when the light was put out (there was no electricity then) and we went to bed, suddenly we heard whistles, noise, and clatter. Bandits came to the town on horses. I don't know if they went to every house, but they knocked at our door. When nobody answered, they broke the window, opened the door, entered and asked, 'Who lives here?' When nobody answered them again, they set fire to somebody's blanket on the bed and it began to burn. I remember my mother was terribly scared. She asked them, 'What do you think you're doing? Can't you see that a child is

sleeping here?' I don't remember what happened next because I was very scared. Mother took me to another room. I think the adults gave the bandits some money, and they left and went to another house.

This was one story. Another one of this sort took place during the day. I mean, nobody gets really scared during the day. People go outside if they need to. And the streets were very narrow then, so that people could come to one another's house easily. So, one Jew was walking down this street. A bandit caught up with him from behind on a horse, took out his sable and hit the Jew on the head with his sable. The man's head flew away, while his body made two more steps forward and only then fell down. It was a terrible picture that is still before my eyes. I was 3 or 4 years old, but I can still remember it vividly. Fortunately, none of our family suffered during the pogroms or the Civil War 1.

In 1918, when mother realized that my father had died and she was left alone, we went to live in Kiev. Mother had to earn her living, and it was impossible to find a job in Rzhischev. When we first moved we didn't take my grandmother. She joined us later because she couldn't stay alone. In the beginning she managed to live alone because her children, mother's sisters, came to visit her all the time. We thought they would take her to live with them. But they didn't do that, so my mother said, 'Please, she will live with us here.' On the one hand, it was very good that grandmother lived with us because I loved her very much, but on the other hand, our life was hard because only my mother was working in our family.

My mother's good friends had children living in Kiev. They lived in Rzhischev, and when their children grew up, they moved to Kiev. We took a ship to Kiev along the Dnepr River. These friends met us and took us to their house. They had a little house with three rooms. They gave us one room, where my mother and I, and later grandmother Chaya, lived. These people helped my mother find a job. At that time underwear was not sewn at factories, but at home. My mother was very good at this, even though she never studied how to sew. But she could sew a good shirt or a bed-sheet. So, these people found her clients, my mother would go to their homes and get orders. There she was fed, received money and food for her work. This is how we could make ends meet.

We paid nothing for our flat. My mother simply helped the landlords around the house, washed for them, cleaned the house, but they didn't want us to pay. I don't know where they worked, but I'm sure they worked somewhere. Their house was small with no electricity. The toilet and water was outside. There was another flat in the house where a Ukrainian family lived. I don't remember them well, but I remember that we had friendly relations with them.

I was often ill, maybe due to lack of food. I had huge furuncles all over my body. That is why I went to school only in 1921, a year later than I should have. It was a Russian school. I don't know whether there were any Jewish schools around. At home, mother and grandmother spoke Yiddish. (Back then I understood everything they said, but didn't speak much Yiddish. Now, regrettably, I've forgotten everything.) But then my mother said that I should study only in a Russian school, so that I would later be able to study at a university and find a job.

The school I went to was a mixed school, both boys and girls studied there. There were Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish children there. But I don't remember that anyone would offend anybody else for national reasons. Most of our teachers were Russian or Ukrainian, but they treated Jewish children very well; they treated me even in a special, warm way because I was fatherless.

My favorite school subject was mathematics. I also liked physics and literature. I liked to read a lot, even though we didn't have many books at home, but my friends brought me books; we also went to the children's library. I was a Young Octobrist 2. Then I was a pioneer. I remember one interesting situation. Back in Rzhischev, mother pierced my ears and bought me small golden earrings. I wore these earrings all the time. But when I joined the pioneers, we would go to the Pioneer House and children would tease me, saying that a young pioneer should not wear golden earrings. I came home in tears and told my mother that I shouldn't wear the earrings. Mother told me, 'If you began to wear them, you should continue'. But I lost one earring soon after that. I didn't want to lie to my mother, but I was afraid to go home. Finally, I came home and said, 'Mom, I lost one earring'. She said, 'You didn't lose it, you did it on purpose!' No tears, no arguments of mine, could persuade her that I really lost it accidentally. I took off the other earring and the children stopped teasing me. Later, when a special system for changing gold for clothes and food was set up in the USSR, my mother sold my earring and bought me a sweater. [the interviewee is referring to the Torgsin stores.] 3

Grandmother came to Kiev when I was in the 3rd grade, that is, in 1923. Grandmother was religious, so after her arrival we began to celebrate all the Jewish holidays at home. We had no kosher kitchen utensils [for Passover] and were not able to boil it long enough to make them kosher. But my mother would wash them carefully, then hide them and take them out right before the holiday. On Passover we always bought matzah. There was a small basement not far from us; it was very deep, so its windows were below street level. Matzah was secretly baked in that basement and sold through one of the windows. My mother and I would go to buy matzah there. During the 8 days of Passover mother would not allow me to eat regular bread at home. She would say, 'If you really want to eat bread, go to your friends' house, but you can't eat bread at home'.

I remember once the day before the fast on Yom Kippur, when our family was going to have a good dinner in order to fast the next day, I went for a walk with some girls. Mother told me, 'Don't forget, you need to be home for dinner in time'. Well, I was late, and neither my mother nor my grandmother had a chance to eat dinner. They were both nervous, and I was punished. I remember it for my whole life. I also remember that mother and grandmother celebrated other Jewish holidays as well. But they didn't light candles because we had no money to buy them and no place to put lit candles. We lived very poorly.

On Saturday mother never went to work. She didn't go to her Jewish or even Russian clients, but she always warned them, 'I'm not coming tomorrow - it will be Saturday'. At home she also tried to do nothing on that day, only what was necessary, but on Saturdays we always had good lunches. Even though our life was poor, mother always tried to save some food for a good Saturday lunch.

When I was older, my school friends would often visit me, and mother's sister, Basya, who lived in Kiev then, took grandmother Chaya to live with her, because our flat was too crowded. But grandmother didn't live long after that. She died soon after, around 1928.

We had a good company at school. We all liked going to theaters and museums. We went to the Russian and Ukrainian drama theaters. We also celebrated every Soviet holiday: 1st of May, October Revolution Day 4, etc. On those days we had no classes at school, so we would go for a walk. Every family tried to fix a good lunch and invite guests. We also liked going to demonstrations on these holidays.

Among my mother's siblings Rakhil, Basya, Chaika and Fruma were also in Kiev. Fruma was still single. She got married a few years later and her husband took her to Moscow.

After finishing the 7-year school I entered the cooperative technical college. I studied at the department for library studies for three years. At that time we never thought of people's nationalities. At our technical college there were Jewish students and students of other nationalities. But this question never worried us. I only remember we had a Ukrainian student who always spoke Ukrainian, so all the teachers always told him to speak Russian. All teaching in our college was done in Russian.

At that time we lived in another place. The husband of my mother's sister Rakhil was a high-ranking party worker. At that time there were many private houses. So, this man told us that there were several flats owned by somebody called Parkhomovsky in Zhilyanskaya Street. And Rakhil and her husband had no flat in Kiev. So, he went to Parkhomovsky, intimidated him with something and said that if he didn't give him the flats, they would be confiscated from him. So, Parkhomovsky gave him two flats - their family stayed in one, and my mother and I, in the other one. They had two sons, Boris and Mark Kamenkovich. They were younger than I but we were good friends. We remained friends for life.

When I went to college, there was a military unit right across the street from our college. We went to dance at each other's clubs: we girls went to dance at theirs, and they came to dance at ours. This is how I met my future husband. I was 19 years old then, and he was 26. He was from a Jewish family. My husband's family comes from Gomel in Belarus. At that time they were living in Kiev, and my husband served in the army. His name was Litman Veksler. His father worked at the construction site of the Kiev central train station. My husband's parents were very good, wonderful people. They received me very nicely and made friends with my mother.

They had five children. They were born into a very poor Jewish family, in a some small shtetl called Gomel in Belarus. My husband's parents were religious, kept all traditions, and went to the synagogue. My husband was the eldest son; he had a sister Roza, brother Grisha, a sister Sonya and brother Izya. Only Izya is still alive today. He lives in Kiev. He celebrated his golden wedding, the 50th anniversary, last year.

When I finished college he went to my mother to ask for permission to marry me. It was very solemn. He brought flowers - he knew that both my mother and I loved flowers very much. To have at least two small flowers in a vase was like a law for us. Even though we were poor, having flowers at home was our hobby. So, after that we got married. It was in 1933. There was no wedding ceremony or anything like that. He came from work, told me to wait for him. Then we went to the registration office, from there we went to his parents, who cooked a regular lunch. We had no wedding rings, no special dresses. Everything was very simple. I think we did it in such a way because we were very poor.

My husband was still serving, but very soon, in the autumn, he was demobilized. He was given a room in a communal apartment 5. We had a big room in a communal flat. We had three neighbors, a common kitchen and a toilet, but we got used to living with neighbors. My husband only had secondary education, but he was a highly educated man. He worked at a woodwork factory as the chief of the shift. Then he was transferred to work for the city executive committee as chief of some department. We continued to live in our room, even though my husband would have been

able to get a flat adequate to his office. But he was very modest and considered it indecent for a party member to ask for the improvement of his living conditions. His mother told him, 'Litmanke (she called him Litmanke), why don't you take care of getting a new flat?' And he answered her, 'Mom, I shouldn't do that now. The time will come when I'll get one, but not now.' That's how it was.

My husband wasn't paid much. He received the 'party maximum' - the sum that was the maximum limit for him to earn as a party member. The sum was not very large, but we didn't demand much, so it was enough for us. He had been a member of the Communist Party since the 1920s, so he was a man who believed in communism. Throughout his whole life he believed in the ideals of communism. He didn't know, and didn't want to know, what really happened in our country, and thought that everything happened because it was meant to.

I entered the Kiev Construction Institute. When I finished the 1st year I gave birth to our daughter Mira, whom we called Lyalechka, in 1935. But I didn't quit my studies because my mother and mother-in-law helped me and this way I could continue my studies.

At this time political repression and arrests [the so-called Great Terror] 6 started. I knew all about it. There was one situation. My husband's friend, Iosif Kaplunov, a Jew, occupied a high military office. Then he was accused of doing something illegal. My husband's friends told my husband, 'Stop talking to Iosif because you will suffer too'. But we were friends with the Kaplunov family. So, my husband was warned that he shouldn't visit him any more. But he still continued to meet Iosif's wife in some deserted streets in order to learn something new about Iosif's fate after his arrest. Iosif was released soon; he didn't spend too much time in prison.

In general, we certainly knew that people around us were arrested, but my husband never discussed such questions with me. He said I was too young and I had other things to take care of. I think he simply wanted to spare me. I was a Komsomol 7 member and trusted everything I heard, absolutely everything.

We celebrated all Soviet holidays. Our favorite holidays were 1st of May and October Revolution Day. My husband's friends and colleagues would come with their spouses, and we would throw a party, sing songs, listen to the gramophone, and dance. We didn't keep any Jewish traditions, we didn't even think about it. My mother lived with us, and she continued to buy matzah every Passover, but I don't even know where she got it. We didn't have any kosher kitchen utensils [for Passover] at home and kept bread on Passover, but my mother always had matzah.

We knew that there was fascism in Germany and that the war broke out in Europe. But we believed that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 8 guaranteed that our country would never be engaged in a war, so we were not ready for the war. For us, just like for the millions of Soviet people, the beginning of the war was absolutely unexpected.

So, in June 1941 my husband rented a dacha for us outside Kiev, in the village of Ukrainka. It was not the first time we rested there. On Saturdays my husband came to visit us. He had a special car that served him from work, and he spent Sundays with us. But on Saturday, 21st June my husband didn't come to the dacha, and we were waiting for him all Sunday morning. We had no radio at the dacha; neither did we receive newspapers there. Later, dacha landowners came home very sad and somewhat lost. We were in a wonderful mood and I turned to them with a smile, asking what happened. They told us that war had broken out. I ran to the Dnepr shore to find a boat that would

take us to Kiev. We immediately gathered our belongings and went to the boat, but the boats were already gone - instead there was a great crowd of people who wanted to leave.

My husband came then. He had already been mobilized and had a paper that said, 'called up on the first day of the war', but he didn't wear his military uniform, and came to take us. So, we went home, he put on his military uniform and went to the military enlistment office. However, he stayed in Kiev for a long time. He worked at the pontoon-bridge battalion. They defended approaches to Kiev from the Dnepr River. He called us every day. But a short time later, about a week-and-a-half, my husband came home and said we needed to evacuate.

By that time I had already graduated from university and was working (I found a job right before the war). I worked at the Kiev highway construction department. I evacuated with this organization. In July we left by regular train. I evacuated with my daughter and mother. We were taken to Dnepropetrovsk. My mother-in-law (my father-in-law was no longer alive) remained in Kiev and evacuated with the family of her other son. When we reached Dnepropetrovsk, we were told that we couldn't go any further because the railway had been heavily bombed.

My mother's elder sister, Etl, lived not far from the train station in Dnepropetrovsk. When we arrived there, one of my mother's sisters, Chaika, was already there with her daughter. Our mood was awful, we were crying. We spent only two or three days there, then bombing raids on Dnepropetrovsk began. Etl's husband put us on a ship and sent us further on. He remained in Dnepropetrovsk because he was deputy director of a major plant. We went eastward together with aunts Etl and Chaika. I can't remember all the details of our evacuation now, but I remember that it took us more than two weeks, first by ship, then by different trains with long stops. We were often bombed. It was horrible, but I was young and I felt responsible for my mother and my daughter. That's why I did my best to keep myself under control. Finally we arrived in the town of Kokand in Central Asia.

When we arrived in Kokand [Uzbekistan] we were received nicely. We were immediately settled in different flats. We didn't have any jobs yet, but our living conditions were quite satisfactory. Very soon I wrote to my husband to our home address. His unit was stationed in Kiev and he was able to visit our flat sometimes, hoping that I would write to him. He received my letter, wrote me back to Kokand and thus we established communication, which, unfortunately, was short because I stopped receiving letters from him in the winter of 1942.

When I learned that Kiev was occupied by the Germans, it caused me great sorrow. My husband was still alive, I was still receiving letters from him, but this news brought me a lot of sorrow. There was a loudspeaker at the central square of Kokand, which looked like a big black plate, and all the people ran there to listen to the latest news. I would often run there too. That's where I heard that Kiev was occupied. I didn't listen to it any more, but ran home crying, 'Mother, Lyalechka, Kiev has been surrendered, Lyonya is no longer alive', even though my husband was still alive. I think I had that terrible feeling that he would die soon. And my little daughter told me, 'Mom, don't worry. You will become my mother and father together'.

My husband was killed somewhere in Sumy, Ukraine. There were a lot of units of the Soviet army there, and they were all bombed, even without fighting. I received a paper that said that my husband 'is reported missing'. I realized that he was killed because otherwise he would have found us after the war.

We were in Kokand in evacuation during the whole war. The attitude of the locals towards us was very warm. I was working at the office of the canteen because they needed literate people. We ate at the same canteen. We didn't starve, but I had a feeling of insecurity, when there was no husband behind my back, when everything was bad. As soon as Kiev was liberated, we received an invitation for the three of us that we could go to Kiev. At that time it was impossible to go home from evacuation without a special invitation. We came to Kiev but had no place to live. The very next day after the Germans entered Kiev, bombs left by our soldiers began to explode all over the city. Kreschatik, the main street of Kiev, was blown up, and our house was blown up - one of the first because a German office was located next to it.

Boris Kamenkovich, the son of aunt Rakhil, with whose family we had lived, came to Kiev at that time. Before the war Boris (who danced very well) had been taken into a famous dancing band and spent the whole war in it. They went to every front and performed there. After the war the band stayed in Moscow. As soon as Kiev was liberated, all the Kiev residents in that band went to their native town for a few days. That's when we saw Boris. He came to our house, wearing his uniform and looking very important in it. Other people were living in the flat and all our furniture was missing. They got so scared when they saw him! Boris asked them, 'Tell me, who took our furniture. I need to get it back before my parents come back to Kiev'. And he was able to collect a wardrobe, a bed, chairs and a table - a lot of furniture. He took it back to his flat. We settled there and lived there until his parents came back.

Then the department that I was working in gave me a room. We settled there, but the very next day there was a knock on the door - its former residents came. I didn't let them in for several days; we didn't go out for several days so that they would not occupy it in our absence. Then we were given a room in Pechersk, but the same story was repeated there. Our department was given a plot of land in Gorky Street for construction, and I was given a room there. But until the construction of that building was finished, I lived with the secretary of our party organization, Viktor Korshenko. He was an extremely kind man, who had pity on my daughter and me.

In the autumn of 1947 we finally moved into our own flat. By that time, almost all of our relatives who had lived in Kiev before the war returned to Kiev: my mother-in-law, mother's sisters Rakhil and Chaika.

My husband's brother Izya fought in the war, then fought against Japan, and then he stayed in the Far East. Samuel also remained alive, but their third brother died defending Moscow.Practically all the members of our large family were evacuated and then returned to Kiev. Only the husband of Klara, Chaika's daughter, Leva, didn't want to evacuate. He said, 'I speak German well and I will make friends with them'. So, he stayed and was killed in Babi Yar 9. He alone from our large family was so self-confident that, as a result, he was shot in Babi Yar.

I continued to work in the highway construction department. It was then turned into a ministry. I worked there for the rest of my life till my retirement. In 1945, I joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was entirely my wish: my husband was a real Bolshevik, I was a Komsomol member, and so it was my sincere desire.

The attitude towards the Jews changed everywhere - in Kiev and not only in Kiev. But I think I was lucky in this regard. A man called Mikhail Dovgan was my boss; he was a very good man and I experienced no anti-Semitism at work.

I remember Stalin's death very well. We lived in a communal apartment, and the two other rooms in that flat were occupied by the family of a general who returned from the front. When Stalin died, the general entered my room. He was a little drunk and very upset. He asked me, 'Sima Markovna, how are we going to live now without Stalin?' And even though I took Stalin's death calmly, I also sensed his anxiety.

So, we lived with my mother and my daughter. My daughter went to school. They had a class of mixed nationalities and they never had any problems; relations between children and teachers' attitude to Jewish children were wonderful. My daughter was very good friends with our neighbor's daughter, who was Ukrainian. It was a whole Ukrainian family, but our relations were good. These neighbors were the first in our house to buy a TV set, so everybody else would go to their flat to watch it. They would often come and invite my mother too.

Until her last days my mother kept Jewish traditions to the best of her abilities. She didn't go to the synagogue because it was too hard for her, but she had a prayer book at home and she tried to do nothing around the house on Saturday: she would prepare everything on Friday evening. On Saturdays we always had a special dinner. On Passover we always had matzah.

When my daughter finished school, she didn't really want to enter the Road- Transport Institute. But at that time it was hard for Jews to enter universities. So, the secretary of the party organization, Korshenko, at whose house we once lived, helped us - he went to the director of the Road- Transport Institute and asked him to accept my daughter. She passed her exams with not very good marks, but she was privileged because her father had been killed in the war, so she was admitted. Sometimes I think it would have been better for her not to have entered there.

My mother died in 1956 and my daughter in 1957. She was a very good student, she liked her studies; she finished the first year and then the second year. Everything went well and she was very happy. Then she went to the third year. After the third year she and other students went to practice. Their practice was near Odessa, where the Kiev-Odessa highway was built; it was closer to Odessa. At that time I was in a health resort outside Kiev - I just took advantage of the fact that my daughter was at the practice. A few days later, Korshenko came to pick me up by car. 'Sima Markovna, let's go to Kiev!' And he looked very energetic. I told him immediately, 'What happened to my daughter?' He said, 'Nothing serious!' I demanded, 'Tell me immediately!' I couldn't move. So, he put me in his car and took me to Kiev. On the way he told me that my daughter had been hit by a car and was now at the Institute of Neurosurgery. When I came to Odessa my daughter was no longer alive. In Odessa she was put into a coffin and the coffin was put on a truck. So, I took my only daughter, my only joy and meaning of my life, to Kiev. I buried her next to my mother, and I always think about how good it was that my mother had not lived to see the death of her granddaughter. I was left alone. I never married again. I devoted all my life to work and fellowship with a few friends.

I have already told you about my cousin, Boris Kamenkovich. He became a very famous man in Kiev's theaters - he was the chief ballet master of the Opera Theater and of the Ukrainian Drama Theater. He was married to a stage director, famous in her circles, Irina Molostova. Everybody treated him nicely in the theater. Last year, when he celebrated his 80th birthday, a special celebration was organized in the theater in his honor - many Ukrainian workers of culture were invited; his son came from Moscow (he works there in a theater, too). Unfortunately, Irina

Molostova died several years ago. When my cousin Boris introduced me to his friends he always said, 'This is my cousin Sima - an iron lady'. Boris died very recently, and I was left absolutely alone. His brother Mark lives in Germany.

My parents' brothers and sisters died a long time ago. My cousin Bronya Shvartser lives in Israel; Hannah, in America. Some other relatives live around the world. Only my husband's brother Izya still lives in Kiev.

Many of my relatives and friends moved to other countries for good, but I had made up my mind on this question a long time ago - the remains of my dear daughter are buried here and I will always live here. 'My daughter, you are a part of me', says the inscription on her tombstone.

Recently, it became possible to communicate more with the Jews, to take part in Jewish life. While I was relatively healthy I often visited the Jewish charity center, the Hesed, attended Jewish concerts, read Jewish newspapers. Today I need more help, and Hesed helps me and takes care of me. In conclusion I would like to say that despite the fact that my life has been very hard, I am a person who has never looked at the material side of life, and I believe I was very lucky in this life to meet many good people, both among my friends and among my relatives. I've never felt really lonely.

Glossary

1 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.

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

3 Torgsin stores
Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

4 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.

5 Communal apartments

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

6 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.

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 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non- aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern

Europe.

9 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.