

# Bella Zeldovich

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Alexandr Tonkonogiy

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*Bella Zeldovich is a nice gray-haired, elderly woman. She was willing to give this interview, but she preferred to talk about others rather than herself. Bella keeps her house clean and cozy. She lives with her daughter, who is married and does all the necessary housework. The apartment is furnished with furniture bought in the 1980s. There are many tiny things such as vases and statuettes in the house.*

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## **My family background**

My grandfather on my father's side, Solomon Zeldovich was born in Vilno [today Vilnius, Lithuania] in 1860. All I know about my grandfather is what my father told me. My grandfather's parents passed away when he was small and he was raised at the municipal children's home in Vilno. In the late 1860s some childless relatives of his took him to Nikolaev where they lived. They must have been wealthy people since they could afford to give him a good education. My father said that my grandfather finished a grammar school and studied at Novorossiysk University [after 1919 Odessa University].

My grandfather supplied timber to the shipbuilding yard in Nikolaev. He owned a big storage facility and five residential buildings in the center of Nikolaev where he also leased apartments. My grandfather's family lived in one of these houses near the timber storage facility. They were religious. They followed the kashrut and my grandfather went to the synagogue on holidays. He had a beard and moustache and wore clothing typical for merchants. My father told me that there were Jewish self- defense [1](#) units during the 1905 pogroms [2](#) in some streets in Nikolaev and those neighborhoods didn't suffer that much. In my grandfather's neighborhood there was also a self-defense unit and their Russian neighbors also helped them. My grandfather's property didn't suffer from pogroms.

My grandfather died of a heart attack in Nikolaev in 1915 at the age of 55. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Nikolaev. After the Revolution of 1917 [3](#), when the synagogue didn't operate for some time, my grandmother Leya Zeldovich, nee Lichtenzon, leased one of their houses to the

Jewish community to serve as a prayer house for Jews.

My grandmother was born in Nikolaev in 1864. She came from a religious family and was religious, too. She always lit candles on the Eve of Sabbath. She wore a wig that she only took off before she went to bed. When I came to her room in the evening I didn't recognize her and always asked my parents, 'Who's this old woman sitting in our room?'. They explained to me that it was my grandmother who had taken off her wig. My grandparents got married in 1879 when my grandfather studied at university. They were very young when they got married. No doubt, they had a traditional wedding. My grandmother's oldest daughter was born in 1880 when she was 16.

My grandmother was a housewife. From the time I remember her she could hardly walk and her condition got worse with age. In 1930 she moved to her older daughter in Odessa. Since she was paralyzed she needed special care and my parents couldn't afford to pay for a nurse. My grandmother died of a heart attack in Odessa in 1930 at the age of 66. She was buried in Odessa. My grandfather Solomon and grandmother Leya had seven children: Rosa, Elizabeth, Boris, Leo, my father Samuel, Aron and Manya. All of them except for Boris were born in Nikolaev. The family was wealthy and all children got a good education.

My father's older sister Rosa was born in 1880. She finished grammar school and medical school. She worked as a medical nurse. She was married. Her husband's name was Natan and he was a Jew. Rosa had two children: Munia and Nyuma. They were much older than I. I don't remember if Rosa's family observed Jewish traditions. Rosa and her family moved to Odessa in the late 1920s. Rosa's husband and children perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War [4](#). Rosa perished in the ghetto in Odessa in 1941.

Elizabeth was born in 1882. She finished grammar school and the Medical Faculty of Novorossiysk University. In Nikolaev Elizabeth met a Jewish man from Lodz, Poland. She and her husband moved to Lodz before the Revolution of 1917. She worked as a doctor there. She had a daughter called Ella. My parents corresponded with Elizabeth. When World War II began in 1939, Elizabeth's family moved to Belgium. When Germans occupied Belgium in 1940 they wanted to move to England by boat. The ship was bombed by German planes. Elizabeth and her family perished. My parents only got to know about their death after the Great Patriotic War.

My father's older brother Boris was born in 1884 in Saint-Petersburg, where my grandparents lived temporarily during some business. He finished a grammar school in Nikolaev and then an art school in Saint-Petersburg. Boris was an artist, a painter. He was married and had two children: Lilia and Rafael. He died in Saint-Petersburg in 1910. I have no information about his wife and daughter. His son Rafael was a painter, too. He died in Leningrad in 1992.

My father's second brother Leo was born in 1886. After finishing grammar school in Nikolaev he graduated from the Shipbuilding Institute in Saint-Petersburg. He worked as an engineer at the shipbuilding yard in Nikolaev. Leo was married, but had no children. He died in Leningrad in 1930. I have no information about his wife.

My father's third brother Aron was born in Nikolaev in 1890. Aron finished secondary school and a technical college in Moscow. During World War I he served in the tsarist army and was in captivity in Austria. He told his family that Germans treated him well when he was in captivity. He returned to Russia in 1918. Aron got married in 1921. His wife's name was Sarah. They had a son called

Lyoma. In the 1930s Aron and his family moved to Odessa where he was superintendent in a shop of the garment factory. During the Great Patriotic War Sarah and Lyoma were in evacuation in Tashkent. After the war Aron continued to work as a shop superintendent at the garment factory. He died in Odessa in 1957. His wife and son moved to Australia in the early 1970s, and, after a few years, further on to the US. His wife died in the 1980s, and his son works as a doctor in America.

My father's younger sister Manya was born in 1892. She finished a grammar school. She was married. Her husband's name was Semyon. Manya moved to Odessa in the 1930s. After the war she moved to Moscow with her family. She was a housewife and had a daughter called Ella. Manya died in Moscow in 1976. I have no information about her husband. Her daughter Ella lives in Israel and works as a doctor.

My father, Samuel Zeldovich, was born in Nikolaev on 20th September 1888. He finished a grammar school in Nikolaev and then a commercial college in Vienna. In 1914 my grandfather sent my father to Palestine to get familiar with our historical Motherland. At that time World War I began and all young people subject to recruitment were ordered to return to Russia. So my father returned to Russia. He was recruited to the tsarist army in which he served until the end of World War I. He returned to Nikolaev in the early 1920s.

My mother's father, Avrum Chernenko, was born in the village of Zultz [since 1945 Veseloye], Nikolaev region, in 1864. It was a German colony [5](#), although there was a German, Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish population in this village. I don't know what my grandfather Avrum did for a living. His family wasn't wealthy. They rented a house in the village. My grandfather was deeply religious. He went to the synagogue several times a week and prayed at home regularly with his tallit and tefillin on. He wore a beard and a kippah at home. He was a very handsome and tall man, and very intelligent.

During the Civil War [6](#), when pogroms began, a nice German family helped my grandfather's family to move to Nikolaev. Later, some Germans visited us in Nikolaev and then in Odessa. I don't know who arranged the pogroms, but my parents said that they took away everything they could lay their hands on. White Guards [7](#) came and there was a pogrom and when the power switched to red troops [Reds] [8](#) there were also pogroms and it was difficult to make a difference between these gangs [9](#). In Nikolaev my grandfather's family rented an apartment and my grandfather worked as assistant in some shop. In 1932 he moved to Odessa and lived with my parents. My grandfather refused to evacuate during the Great Patriotic War and perished in 1941. He didn't believe that Germans would do any harm to Jews. He was shot in the village of Dalnik [10](#) at the age of 77.

My grandmother on my mother's side, Ella Chernenko, was born in Zultz in 1865. I don't know her maiden name. She was educated at home; her father taught her to read and write in Yiddish and to pray in Hebrew. She was a housewife. My grandparents got married in 1883. My grandmother died of a stroke in Nikolaev in 1927 or 1928, at the age of about 62. I was very young back then and don't remember her at all. My parents told me that she was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions. Kaddish was recited at the funeral and my grandfather kept sitting on the floor for seven days after her funeral. My maternal grandparents had four children: Isaac, Israel, Clara and my mother Sarah.

My mother's older brother Isaac was born in 1884. He studied at cheder in Zultz and finished the commercial school in Nikolaev. I don't know what he did for a living in Nikolaev after he finished

school. In the 1930s he moved to Odessa where he worked as a shop assistant in a haberdashery store. He got married to a woman called Bella and they had a son called Leonid. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War Isaac said, 'You may leave if you feel like it, but we shall stay here. I don't believe that Germans will do us any harm. It must be propaganda'. Isaac and his son Leonid were shot in Dalnik, like my grandfather, in 1941. Isaac's son Leonid was only 11 years old.

My mother's brother Israel was born in 1888. Like his older brother he finished the commercial college in Nikolaev. Israel was married; his wife's name was Rachel. They didn't have any children. In 1932 he moved to Odessa where he worked in the same store as his brother Isaac. He was a shop assistant. During the Great Patriotic War Israel and his wife stayed in Odessa. When Germans occupied Odessa they arrested him immediately. I don't know how he perished. His wife was hiding in a Russian family. I don't know whether they were their friends or neighbors. In 1943 somebody reported on her and she perished, too.

My mother's older sister Clara was born in Zults in 1890. In the 1930s she moved to Odessa with her family. Clara was a housewife. She was married and had a daughter named Katherine. Katherine was finishing her 1st year of studies at the Chemical Faculty of Odessa University when the Great Patriotic War began. Clara and her daughter evacuated to Aktyubinsk [Kazakhstan]. Katherine went to study at Moscow Medical Institute which had evacuated to Tashkent. Upon graduation she moved to Leningrad. She got married there in 1946. Her husband was Russian. He was sentenced to imprisonment in 1949 and was at the wood-logging site in Omskaya region, Siberia. Katherine followed her husband with her baby. They returned to Leningrad after four years. Katherine died in Leningrad in the 1960s. Clara had returned to Odessa where she died in 1947. I don't know what happened to her husband.

My mother was the youngest in the family. She was born in Zults in 1902. I don't know where she studied. My grandfather taught her Jewish traditions and prayers. Grandmother Ella taught her housekeeping and cooking. She made traditional Jewish food: gefilte fish, chicken and strudels. My mother lived with her parents in Nikolaev before she got married. She helped her mother about the house.

My parents never told me how they met. I guess they met when my mother's family moved to Nikolaev. They got married in 1924 and only had a civil ceremony. They lived in my grandmother's house, which had a number of rooms. They also had housemaids. I don't know what my father did for a living. He might have been a businessman. My grandmother had a room of her own, and my parents had a few rooms for themselves. I had my own children's room. We had meals in the big dining room. The house was nicely furnished. My grandmother had a woman who took care of her. There was also a housemaid.

## Growing up

I was born on 13th September 1925. My brother Leonid was born in Nikolaev on 1st September 1932.

My mother was a housewife. My father and mother came from religious families. They went to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and fasted on Yom Kippur. I remember a general clean-up of the house before Pesach and the removal of chametz from the house. Fancy dishes were put on the table. There was matzah and other traditional food: gefilte fish, chicken broth,

maror (horseradish), charoset and kosher wine. Grandfather Avrum visited us on Pesach. He conducted the seder. I, and, later my brother Leonid, asked our father the traditional four questions [the mah nishtanah]. Our grandfather hid afikoman in the room and we had to find it.

I can't remember any anti-Semitism in Nikolaev. I remember our Russian neighbors, who were as wealthy as Grandfather Solomon. They treated us very well.

In November 1932 our house and belongings were confiscated. It was the end of the NEP [11](#). My parents, Grandfather Avrum, my little brother and I moved to Odessa to escape the persecutions of the authorities. We lived in a communal apartment [12](#) in Paster Street in the central, rich neighborhood of Odessa. We occupied two rooms: 23 and 16 square meters. There was another room with other tenants. We had a common kitchen, running water and a toilet in the apartment. There was a stove to heat the apartment with either wood or coal.

My father was a superintendent at a haberdashery shop. My mother was a housewife. My father spoke Russian and sometimes Yiddish to my mother. He also had a good knowledge of German since he had studied in Vienna. My mother spoke Russian, German and Yiddish. I understand Yiddish because I heard my mother and father speak it.

There was a Jewish theater in Odessa before the war. My mother and I often went to watch performances there. As far as I remember, there were plays by Sholem Aleichem [13](#) on the schedule. My mother and I really liked the performances of the Jewish actress Lia Bugova. [Famous Jewish actress in Odessa, after World War II she performed at the Russian theater in Odessa.] My father never went to the theater.

In Odessa we continued to celebrate Sabbath, Pesach and other Jewish holidays. My grandfather Avrum said a prayer on the Eve of Sabbath. My mother lit the candles. Grandfather Avrum blessed the children. He and my mother tried to observe Sabbath, but my father couldn't have a rest on Saturday because he had to work. My grandfather also conducted the seder on Pesach. Our relatives and friends visited us - there were usually about 20 guests. Our gatherings were very ceremonious. We usually bought matzah at the synagogue or at Jewish bakeries. We had traditional Jewish food on Pesach: fish, matzah and other delicacies. My grandfather and my parents went to the synagogue in Peresyp [14](#) near our house on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. When my grandfather was still alive our family fasted on Yom Kippur. After he died only my mother observed the fasting. She always took chickens to the shochet to have them slaughtered there.

In 1933 I went to a Russian school. We studied chemistry, physics, mathematics, Russian and Ukrainian. I know German, Russian and Ukrainian. The majority of our teachers were Jews. I was fond of mathematics. I had Russian and Jewish friends at school. I became a Komsomol [15](#) member at school. I also attended dancing classes and had piano lessons at a music school. My brother Leonid went to the same school.

1933 was the period of a terrible famine in Ukraine [16](#). My family didn't starve. The husband of my father's sister Manya worked at the windmill in Peresyp. He received flour for his work and shared it with us. We baked bread and ate it.

1937 was the year when arrests began in Odessa and all over the country [during the so-called Great Terror] [17](#). People were arrested at night. There was a hospital and a medical institute across

the street from our house, and many doctors and professors lived in our house. Many of our neighbors were arrested at night and their families had to move into the basement of the house. Our family didn't suffer from arrests.

My younger sister Lubov was born on 3rd April 1939. In the same year World War II began. We had discussions on this subject in our family and were very concerned about the situation. [Editor's note: All the information Bella's family had was from Soviet papers.] My father's sister Elizabeth lived in Poland and we didn't hear from her.

### During the war

On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. It came as a surprise to us. We were afraid, of course. When the war began my father was 57. Regardless of his age he volunteered to the army and went as far as Berlin. My father was a very patient and reserved man. He never complained about the hardships of the war. When asked about that time he usually answered, 'It was a hard time for all of us, so, what can I say - thank God it's all over'.

Odessa had been bombed since July 1941, but the stores and the market were open. Many of our relatives didn't plan to evacuate from Odessa. My mother

hesitated for a long time and only decided to go when our neighbors brought her all the necessary evacuation permits and insisted that she took us, children, out of the house. These neighbors may have known how Germans treated Jews.

We left Odessa at the end of August or beginning of September 1941 I can't remember the exact date. We went by train and our trip was hard and long. My sister Lubov was two and my brother Leonid was nine years old. We had a small package of food and when we ran out of it my mother bought some or got some in exchange for clothes. It took us two weeks to get to the town of Mineralnyye Vody, Stavropol region, [1,100 km from Odessa]. From there we got to Georgievskaya station, near Mineralnyye Vody. After three months, when the frontline moved closer to the collective farm [18](#) where we worked, they evacuated us by tractors with trailers to the Caspian Sea. There we boarded a boat in November 1941. We crossed the Caspian Sea and got to Aktyubinsk, Kazakhstan, [2,000 km from Odessa]. We changed trains to get to Aktyubinsk and the trip took us about two and a half months. Whenever the train stopped at a station my mother asked our fellow travelers to get us some food or water since she didn't want to leave us alone. People were helping us. In Aktyubinsk we went to my mother's sister Clara, who had evacuated three months before. We stayed with her for some time until we rented a room from a Kazakh woman in the same house, where my mother's sister lived. There were two rooms and a kitchen in that apartment.

I worked during the day and went to a secondary school in the evenings. Many of our teachers were Jews. I finished school with a gold medal in 1943. I went to work at a military plant, in evacuation from Moscow that manufactured bombs. I had friends at this plant. One of my friends was a local girl called Aisha. We went for walks and to the local club for dance parties. I still correspond with her.

My mother stayed at home to take care of my sister and my brother Leonid, who was in the 3rd grade back then. We were in evacuation for almost three and a half years. We weren't used to the



severe climate in Kazakhstan: minus 40 degrees in winter, and extremely hot in summer. Local people helped people who were in evacuation and supported them as much as they could. We never faced any anti-Semitism. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions though. We corresponded with my father all the time.

We returned to Odessa in April 1945, two weeks before the war was over. On 9th May [Victory Day] [19](#) we heard about the victory on the radio. Everybody was overwhelmed with joy. My father returned home - he was an old man and subject to immediate demobilization. We couldn't move into our apartment. The house had partly been ruined during the war and some family had repaired it and moved in. There was no way to get it back. Later we received a two-bedroom apartment with a kitchen in the same house where we had lived before the war.

My father was superintendent in the shop of a haberdashery factory. My mother was a housewife. My brother Leonid studied in the 7th grade. My sister Lubov was the youngest in our family and everyone's darling. In 1946 she also started school and my brother and I took turns to take her to school in order to help my mother.

A coupon system was introduced after the war. There were things to buy at the black market after the war, but the prices were too high - 200 rubles per loaf of bread while the average salary was 400 rubles. Nobody could afford to buy things there. The standard rate of bread per coupons was 400 grams for a child and 800 grams for an adult.

## After the war

After the Great Patriotic War the synagogue in Peresyp opened. On Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah my mother and father went to the synagogue. It was possible to hear Yiddish in Odessa in those days. Jews were gradually returning from evacuation. In my opinion Jews weren't treated very well in Odessa after the war. Maybe the reason was that when Jews wanted to move into their old apartments, Russian families that occupied them were ordered to move out.

I got a job as an assistant accountant at the Financial College. In the evening I attended classes at the evening department of the Credit and Economy Faculty of Lomonosov Institute. Since I had finished school with a gold medal in Aktyubinsk I was admitted without exams. There were no restrictions for Jews to enter higher educational institutions. There were many Jewish students and Jewish lecturers at the institute - I don't remember the exact number. We didn't pay any attention to issues of nationality at that time. I had Russian and Jewish friends and didn't face any anti-Semitism.

Upon graduation in 1949 I got a job assignment [20](#) in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. I worked as a credit inspector in the main bank of Armenia for three years. It was a good job and a good location. There were only Jews that had been in evacuation in Armenia and there were no synagogues. I didn't observe any traditions while I lived in Armenia - it was a very difficult post-war time. I was glad to have survived the war. I had gotten the job assignment in Armenia along with a friend of mine and we rented a room in a communal apartment together. There were no comforts in the apartment. It was heated with wood or coal. In 1949 the campaign against cosmopolitans [21](#) began. The Jewish and Armenian population was worried and concerned about the situation. After I completed the term of my job assignment I returned to Odessa.

In 1948 Israel was established. I was very enthusiastic about it, just like all other Jews. After such a horrific war, in which so many Jews had been exterminated, our people were happy to have a home country. However, the situation in Israel is rather severe and still our people are being killed. I've never thought of moving to Israel since the issue of moving to another country never interested me.

During the postwar period there were no restrictions for Jews to enter higher educational institutions as long as they were clever enough to pass their entrance exams. Those that finished school with a gold medal were admitted without entrance exams. My brother Leonid entered Odessa Polytechnic Institute and my sister Lubov entered Odessa Pedagogical Institute. All my cousins have a higher education, too. Difficulties for Jews that wanted to enter higher educational institutions began in the 1960s. [Editor's note: In reality, beginning from the early 1950s, admission of Jews was significantly restricted from the early 1950s and this limitation was authorized by the highest authorities as an expression of state anti-Semitism.] It was also difficult for Jews to get a job - Russians or Ukrainians were given priority. I believe it was a state policy; people of other nationalities had nothing to do with this segregation.

My brother Leonid finished school in 1948 and entered the Mechanical Faculty at Odessa Polytechnic Institute. He graduated in 1953 and worked as a mechanical engineer. In 1955 Leonid married Svetlana, a Jewish woman. They have a daughter called Marina. My brother has always had more Jewish friends. After he got married my brother and his family lived in a three- bedroom apartment. Leonid left for America three years ago. He lives in New York. He doesn't work any more - he's already 70 years old. His wife Svetlana looks after elderly people. His daughter Marina works as an economist in Odessa. She goes to the synagogue on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah.

My sister Lubov finished school in 1955 and graduated from the Physics/Mathematic Faculty of Odessa Pedagogical Institute in 1960. She worked as a teacher at a secondary school. She got married in 1964. Her husband's name was Efim Yarmunik. He was a Jew. He was production manager at the Centrolit Factory. She has two sons; Igor and Sasha [Alexandr]. Igor graduated from the Agricultural Institute and got married. His wife's family moved to America, and Igor and his wife also decided to move there. My sister followed her older son. She left for America in 1990. Her husband died on his way to buy plane tickets, three months before their departure. He died at the age of 53. Lubov lives in New York now. She looks after elderly people. Igor and Sasha work as programmers.

I got married in 1951. My husband, Esay Germer, is Jewish. He was my schoolmate and we were neighbors. He was born in 1923. Esay was an only child. His father, Abram Germer, was arrested in 1937. He was sentenced to a term in the camps in Arkhangelsk. After Abram returned from exile he was murdered at the entrance to his house. We never found out who did it. Esay's mother was a housewife. She perished in the ghetto in Odessa during the Great Patriotic War.

In 1940 Esay entered a military school and in 1941 he went to the front. He finished the war in Berlin. After the war Esay served in Germany and we corresponded. In 1951 he came on leave to Odessa and we got married. We registered our marriage at a civil registration office.

After we got married Esay got an officer assignment to serve in Saratov where we lived for three years. I was an economist at the radio plant. We rented a room on the 3rd floor of a communal apartment. Our co-tenants were the family of my husband's colleague. We had central heating,



water and a toilet in this apartment. We also had a common kitchen. There weren't many Jews in Saratov at that time. We mostly socialized with my husband's colleagues. They were military and there were hardly any Jews among them. There was a beautiful synagogue in Saratov, but I only went to look at it.

The Doctors' Plot [22](#) began in 1952. My daughter Katia was born on 26th January 1953. My doctor was a Jewish woman. She was very worried about the situation. There were rumors that Stalin wanted to deport Jews to the North and the Far East [Birobidzhan] [23](#). Thank God Stalin died and this didn't happen. When Stalin died in 1953 I and my family, along with many other people, were in grief and thought that there could be no life or justice without Stalin.

In 1953 my husband demobilized from the Soviet army with the rank of major. We didn't have any relatives or close friends in Saratov. Our family was in Odessa. Since our daughter Katia was only four months old I couldn't go to work. So we moved to Odessa. We lived with my parents, brother and sister. My sister Lubov was in the 8th grade and my brother Leonid was a student at an institute. We didn't have enough space in our two-bedroom apartment, but we got along well. My mother helped me with the baby and Lubov also enjoyed spending time with Katia.

My husband went to work as a polisher at the Poligraphmash Plant and went to study at the Evening Department of Odessa Polytechnic Institute. Upon graduation he worked at the Special Design Bureau of the plant. He was a mechanic engineer. He worked at the plant for many years. Esay was very valued at the plant. There were representatives of many nationalities at the plant but he never faced any anti-Semitism there. My husband wasn't a party member. He went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. His relatives perished in Odessa during the war and he left a note with their names at the synagogue so that prayers would be said for them. We didn't observe other traditions.

In 1954 I went to work at the Mechanic Plant in Kvorostina Street. I worked as an economist at this plant until 1996. I worked in the area of Moldavanka [poor Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. There were Russian families there, too, and they understood and spoke Yiddish. Ever so often, when two people talked in Yiddish, it was difficult to say who was Russian and who was Jewish. Once I asked my colleagues at the plant, 'Why do you all call this guy Mosha when he doesn't even look the least bit like a Jew?' They replied, 'He lives in Moldavanka. His neighbors are Jews and they call everybody in a Jewish manner'.

I worked 42 years at this plant. I had many friends there and still keep in touch with them. I was supposed to retire in 1980, but the management of the plant offered me to stay at work a little longer. I worked there for another 16 years. We were not poor; but we had neither dacha, nor car. However, my husband and I traveled a lot all over the USSR, visited the Caucasus, Latvia, Estonia and Uzbekistan.

Katia began school in 1960. She was successful with her studies. She was fond of mathematics and English. I associate the 1960s with my daughter's childhood and her teens. Katia had quite a few Jewish and Russian friends. They often came to visit her at home. Every year we arranged birthday parties for her at home. I liked watching her and her friends grow up and fall in love for the first time. Katia spent her vacations at a pioneer camp at the seashore. We traveled to the Crimea with the whole family several times. Katia finished school with a silver medal and entered the Faculty of Economics of Lomonosov Technological Institute. She had problems being admitted to the institute,

which, I believe, was due to her nationality. She had to take entrance exams, although she had a silver medal. But she passed them and entered the institute. Upon graduation Katia worked as an economist at a design institute.

She got married in 1977. Her husband, Dmitriy Gershengorn, is a Jew. He graduated from the Mechanical Faculty of Lomonosov Technological Institute. He worked as a designer at a design institute. In the 1980s, during perestroika, this institute was closed and Dmitriy went to work as a foreman at a heating agency. My daughter works as an economist/accountant with a private company. My daughter's son Sergey was born in 1978. My husband and I became grandparents. I spent all my time with our little grandson. He was a great joy for me. I didn't quite notice how Sergey grew up and finished school. He is 24 now. Sergey graduated from the Mechanical Faculty of Odessa University. He works as a programmer at a bank. He doesn't go to the synagogue.

In 1975 my father died of a heart attack. My mother died in 1988. She had a brain tumor. They were both buried according to the Jewish tradition near the entrance to the Jewish cemetery. My husband died of rectum cancer in 1987. He was also buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Many of my acquaintances and relatives have recently left Odessa. The people that were leaving were treated with sympathy by others. Everybody understood that people had a right to live where they preferred to live. Only my niece remained in Odessa. I think it's a very brave decision of people to move to another country. I remember I couldn't wait to come back to Odessa when I had to stay a few years in Yerevan. Odessa is like a Promised Land to me.

At the end of the 1980s Jewish life revived in Odessa. The synagogue in Osipov Street was opened and the building of the main synagogue in Yevreyskaya Street was returned to the Jewish community. There are two Jewish schools, kindergartens, the charity center Gemilut Hesed and an Israeli cultural center in town. We receive Jewish newspapers and watch Jewish programs on television - all in Russian. There is a kosher store in the yard of the synagogue in Richelievskaya Street, and a slaughterhouse in Stolbovaya Street that supplies kosher meat to Jewish organizations and kosher stores.

I've lived with my daughter's family since my husband's death. I have many friends of different nationalities. I've been friends with some of them for 52 years already. My daughter and her husband go to the synagogue very seldom, but we have matzah on holidays and my daughter and I cook traditional Jewish food that our grandmothers used to make: gefilte fish, chicken and other delicious things. I buy matzah at the synagogue in Osipov Street. I hope that my grandson will go to the synagogue on holidays and remember us.

## Glossary

### **1 Jewish self-defense movement**

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

parties and their military units, and it had a widespread following among the rest of the people. Organized defense groups are known to have existed in 42 cities.

## **2 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.

## **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **4 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **5 German colonists**

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

## **6 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.

## **7 White Guards**

A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

## **8 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

## **9 Gangs**

During the Russian Civil War 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.

## **10 Dalnik**

Village 20 km from Odessa, the site of mass executions of Jews during the war.

## **11 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **12 Communal apartment**

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.

## **13 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

## **14 Peresyp**

An industrial neighborhood in the outskirts of Odessa.

## **15 Komsomol**

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

## **16 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.

## **17 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.

## **18 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **19 Victory Day in Russia**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

## **20 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

## **21 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 anti-Semitic 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'.

## **22 Doctors' Plot**

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

## **23 Birobidzhan**

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