

# Marina Shoihet

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Kiev

Ukraine

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Date of interview: March 2002

Maria Scherbo, my grandmother on my mother's side, was born in 1881. I don't know where exactly she was born but at the time when she met my grandfather their family was living in the town of Dashev. Avrum, her father, my great-grandfather, was a well-to-do merchant. Her mother's (my great grandmother's) name was Rieva. They had a big family. They had many children. Isaak, one of their sons, was killed by bandits in 1920, and Grisha, another son, happened to be in Poland during the Revolution of 1917 [1](#). Later he moved to Romania and then to Paris. He died in Paris. Unfortunately, Grisha's grave was never found. I only know my grandmother's sisters. My grandmother was the oldest. The next was Rieva - she was born in 1883. Then came Fania, born in 1884 and Bella born in 1886.

Moisey Reznik, my grandfather, born in 1878, lived in the town of Stavische, Vinnitsa region. My grandmother was introduced to my grandfather at some big wedding. She was 14 and he was 17 years old. They were engaged and then corresponded for four years. My grandmother was not skilled in writing and she wrote her letters using a special letter manual. My grandfather grew up in a poorer family, but he studied and read more, he knew Hebrew, studied the Torah and could interpret the Talmud. He graduated from yeshivah. They got married when my grandmother was 18 and my grandfather was 21 years old. After the wedding they lived in Dashev.

My grandfather grew up in the forest and he rented an apartment in the more spacious outskirts of Dashev. Grandfather Moisey didn't have any business of his own and they were living with my grandmother's parents. He assisted my grandmother's father, but he didn't feel very comfortable about it. It took them a while to start their own business and have a household of their own. They were renting a part of the house, owned by a Russian family. Some noble family was living across the street from their home and my grandmother told me that when they were children they liked to watch what was going on in the yard of these people. There was music playing, and besides, they had beautiful equipages.

My grandfather's parents were not so well off. His father worked as an assistant accountant or an accountant at some timber merchant's company. The name of my grandfather's father was Nuhim Reznik, and his wife's name was Reizl. My grandfather had three sisters - Hontia, Sheva and the third one's name I don't remember. They lived in the woods not far from Vinnitsa. My mother loved to visit my grandfather's parents in the woods. She usually went there on holiday in the summer. They made a swing for her and she spent time there enjoying the fresh air. My grandfather's sisters had a great sense of music. They were friends with the family of that timber merchant. They had an opportunity to read interesting Russian and Jewish books. Besides, they knew quite a few arias from operas and my mother enjoyed their company very much.

Unlike the family of my grandmother, the family of grandfather Moisey was much more pious. They observed all Jewish laws and traditions, the kashrut and everything. My grandmother told me that she was having a hard time when his parents visited them. Dishes for dairy products were to be kept separately from those for meat products, and the food was to be cooked differently.

Grandfather Moisey was a religious man. He knew the Torah and the Talmud, but he wasn't fanatically religious. There was no synagogue in Dashev, but there was a prayer house, where my grandfather went. Even my grandfather and grandmother's wedding was almost jeopardized by the order of my grandfather's father Nuhim to have my grandmother cover her hair with a kerchief, as was appropriate for a married woman. She had very beautiful hair and she couldn't accept this request especially as her own father never requested her to do this. She was very upset, but she agreed to do as she was asked and put on the kerchief. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and everything else.

She gave birth to five children. My mother Anna, born in 1900 was their first child. Her brother Israel was born a year and a half later. Grigoriy was born in 1904, Boris in 1910 and Emil in 1916. My mother was the only girl in the family, and she had four brothers.

My grandfather worked as an assistant accountant. He worked from morning till night. My grandmother stayed with the children but she always felt an urge to go to her parents' house (my great grandmother's Rieva). Her sisters were there and the house was richer. There was a big living room and the furniture was upholstered with dark velvet. There were curtains on the windows and a dinner table in the middle of the room. My great-grandfather was an intelligent man. He went to Germany or Poland to purchase the grain. He ground it at his mill and sold flour. My mother told me that my grandmother was an emotional woman. She was nervous and shouted at her children. She calmed down at the end of the day and became very nice. She dressed up, took her children and went to her father. And that was when the party began. There were many children in the family and the children were running around, the sisters were chatting and it was so much fun. Later in the evening my great-grandfather Avrum got tired of all this fuss and he said in Yiddish, 'Well, dear, you better take them all home now'.

Grandfather Moisey was dependent on his father-in-law in his work and he hated it. Around 1909 or 1910 he decided to start his own business and moved to the town of Gaisin. They had a very different life there. They had a little house. My grandfather found a partner and they ran a mill. Their life in Gaisin was better. They wanted to give education to their children. My grandfather thought that cheder didn't give a good education and they hired teachers for my mother. She had teachers coming to their house to teach her Russian literature, geography, history and German. She studied so until 1915.

Her brother Israel, or as we called him, Srul, studied with her. He was a very smart boy and they decided to send him to school. However, the exams to school were not easy and besides, it cost a lot of money. He passed all exams and was admitted to the school. He was 17 years old in 1918.

This was a time of pogroms. Their house was on the outskirts of the town. In case of an emergency people ran to their house thinking that the bandits would probably not reach this remote spot. And my grandmother always hid them all. One guy in town suffered from asthma and when he was hiding in their house, my grandmother always gave him some food and lumps of sugar, and begged him to make not a sound or cough.

There was one story, funny and sad at the same time. My grandmother was at home alone, and my grandfather took his revolver with him when going to work. People were allowed to have weapons then. All of a sudden some bandits came in shouting, 'Give your gold to us'. She got so scared that she kept saying, 'You just wait - there's gonna be a shot!'. She probably wanted to say that her husband was coming home and that he had a revolver. And then grandfather came in and shot from his revolver. The bandits got scared and ran away. One evening Srul went out and met a fellow student of his, a Russian guy. He started asking him who was at home at the moment and where they kept their valuables. Srul talked with him suspecting nothing and went home. Suddenly three people broke into the house demanding money and valuables. And Srul saw that acquaintance of his taking out his revolver and directing it at his father. Srul shielded him. The bandit shot his revolver and wounded Srul in his stomach. After the shot the bandits got scared and ran away. His parents called a doctor and took Srul to hospital, but it was a deadly wound. Srul lived for three or four more days and then died. This was a big tragedy for the family. It happened in 1918.

There were many pogroms at that time. My grandmother said that those bandits were mostly Petlura [2](#) soldiers. Once Petlura units occupied the town, got all men together and locked them in the sauna building threatening that they would burn them. Then the local rabbi and the Orthodox priest collected some money from the rich people and paid ransom for all the hostages.

Uncle Isaak, my mother's younger brother, went to Kiev to earn some money right after his wedding. Denikin's [3](#) troops were advancing then. He and his wife Polia left on a wagon trying to save their life. But they were stopped somewhere in the vicinity of Belaya Tserkov, robbed and brutally tortured. They threw uncle Isaak - his dead body - into a well. Aunt Polia had three wounds in her head, and they cut off her little finger on her right hand. Later the locals notified their family and brought aunt Polia, who had twins (fortunately they were staying with my grandmother) to my grandfather and grandmother. Later they went to identify the dead bodies and found uncle Isaak.

Before the Revolution, my grandfather and grandmother and their children lived in Gaisin. My mother entered the Burchinskiy private school in 1917 (this was an ordinary school for girls - they were from different families and of various nationalities). I would like to read a few lines, related to the Civil War [5](#), from my mother's diary.

'This is a hard time, a time of the persecution of the Jewish people and of gangs. Polish soldiers were shooting at us and we were hiding in cellars. Once mamma was baking bread in the oven. During the bombing she ran out of the cellar to go to the apartment to take out the bread. She put her life at risk. But it was scary to be starving. The Volynets gang killed 700 Jews in one day - for some reason they were taken for Bolsheviks. The gang came to Gaisin, got all men together and locked them in the butcher's store. My father was there, too - such was the order. The intellectuals of Gaisin - the doctors, the mayor and priests - collected some money to rescue the people. We found out later that the bandits wanted to pour kerosene onto this butcher's store and burn it down. The money rescued the people. Once at school during classes the Jewish girls were told to go home, because the situation in the town was troublesome. Imagine our feelings when we were leaving and the Russian girls stayed and continued their studies. Once schoolboys invited our girls to the ball. I was so excited to go there. I dressed up and curled my hair, my mother bought me thin stockings and beautiful shoes. But then papa came home and didn't allow me to go there. He was afraid that there might be aggression against Jewish girls. I cried so bitterly, I thought I would

never forgive him. We were afraid of going to the theatre because of murderous assaults at night. People earned their living selling things, traveling on railcar roofs to Kiev and Odessa. Winters were freezing. Fania and Bella, my mother's sisters, were having a difficult life, as my grandfather had died and they had no support.'

There are a few lines in my mother's diary about the February Revolution: The February Bourgeois Revolution of 1917 was a big celebration. There was music playing and there was a military parade. Next came October Revolution. People made speeches in the square. The Jews were rejoicing.'

My mother said that the young people had great expectations from the Revolution. They hoped that the new authorities would treat Jews better and put an end to all their troubles. One of the main slogans of the communists was the equality and brotherhood of all nations and people. Jews firmly believed in this and had hopes for a better life. My grandfather and grandmother were far from politics and they didn't care much about these events. My mother told me that when she met my father he was a communist and she was very proud of it, as this was a modern thing at the time.

I would like to tell you about a tragedy in my grandfather's family. It happened after the Revolution of 1917. They had a good life until 1928. When collectivization [4](#) started it turned out that their children didn't have the right to study, as grandfather and grandmother were considered proprietors. Only the children of workers or peasants had the right to study. And they had to give up everything for the sake of their children. At that time a Soviet Jewish farm enterprise was organized in Nikopol, and they gave up their business and went to Nikopol. My mother was married by then and so was her brother Grigoriy. They all went to Nikopol. This was around 1928. They were living in Nikopol when grandfather Moisey found out that bandits broke into his parents, Nuhim and Reizl Reznik's house. Five of them - his father and mother, his two sisters and his grandmother - were in the house. They were all killed. This happened in 1929 in a town near Gaisin. My father went there immediately. There was blood everywhere in their house. They buried their dear ones. Only grandfather Moisey and his sister Sheva stayed alive from all their big family. My great-grandfather Nuhim, great-grandmother Reizl, aunt Hontia and the second sister (I believe, her name was Feiga), and the younger brother Tsyunia died.

My father, Pinhas Shoihet, was born in the town of Stavische on 1st September 1890. My grandfather's real last name was Sheihet, but he changed it to the more pleasant-sounding Shoihet. I know that my grandfather had something to do with timber. I think he was a forester. His children knew a lot about nature, went to the woods to pick mushrooms. This is not very typical for Jews. My father's family was very poor. My grandfather's name was Naum (Nuhim) and my grandmother's name was Rieva. She gave birth to many children. But they died one after the other.

My father's older sister Esther Eidelman was born in 1888. She didn't have any education and she never worked. She raised her children. Her husband Matvey Eidelman worked in commerce. During the war they were in evacuation. Esther died in Kiev in 1970. My father was the second child in the family. The next one was Henrih Shoihet, born in 1904. He died in 1932 from tuberculosis.

My father's next brother, Iosif Shoihet, was born in 1906. He was an invalid - he had one leg. He lost one leg during the Civil War - he jumped from a train to run away from some bandits. He finished trade school and then a technological institute. He worked as a planner. During the war he

was in evacuation with my father's parents. He died in Kiev in 1978.

My father's younger brother Matvey Shoihet was born in 1908. He studied at the Kirov Military Academy in Moscow. He specialized in underground structure construction, and he became a professor and head of department at the Higher School of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow. He was in the army during the war. He died in Moscow in 1983.

My father's parents were in evacuation in Mary, in the Mordovian Republic [in Russia] during the war. My grandfather Naum died there in 1943, and my grandmother Rieva died in Kiev in 1963.

My father had some education. He studied in cheder. He hated it, and he cried every time they took him there. There was a teacher in cheder that beat them all. Although my father didn't have a higher education he was very intelligent and read a lot. But still, when filling in a form he always wrote 'education: 4 years of cheder'. When he was 11 years old he went to work as a forester. He lived in a forester's hut. He started smoking when he was 14. He worked there until 1911. In 1911 he was recruited to the tsarist army. He was in service until 1914. At that time the service term was 3 years and he was about to be released. But World War I began in 1914. So, he was in the army until 1917. When the Revolution of 1917 started he was in Poland. The military were deserting the army and my father ran away from Poland and came to his home in Stavische.

There were various military formations and gangs - the Whites [6](#), the Reds [7](#) and the Greens [8](#) - roaming around during this period. At one moment, my father told me, the Whites got all men together and sentenced them to execution. At this point the Red Army occupied the village. The Red Army freed all men and took them to their military units. That's how my father joined the Red Army, although he didn't belong to any movement. There was a nice commissar in his unit, a Russian man. He was very intelligent and had a tremendous influence on my father with his communist ideas. In 1919 my father became a member of the Communist Party. He served in the Red Kazak units. Their regiment was staying in Moscow for some time in 1919. My father told me they were sent to the Opera as security guard. And he watched all operas that year. In the opera entitled Ivan Susanin he was always standing beside Shaliapin (the famous opera singer). He kept this memory for the rest of his life and he always loved opera.

In 1921 their Red Kazak unit was billeted in Gaisin. The military were accommodated in the houses of the locals. My father got accommodation at my mother's house. By that time my mother had finished school and entered the Odessa Medical Institute. She was visiting her grandfather's at Gaisin after finishing the first year of her studies at the institute. This was a time of terrible lack of food. Her trip was not safe and grandfather Moisey said that he wouldn't let her travel anywhere. So, my mother wasn't quite sure what she was going to do. She met my father at that time. He was 10 years older. My grandmother liked him very much and she decided to introduce him to her sister. My mother's brothers told me how much they admired my father. He rode on a white horse in his uniform, and always brought them some toys, let them sit on his horse, took them to the river and taught them to swim. He was admired by all the children.

My father liked my mother and he was spending much time with her. Their dates were very decent. When it was time to leave my father proposed to my mother to marry him in 1922-23 after he demobilizes. My mother was an ambitious girl and she told him that she wanted to go back to Odessa to continue her studies after the troubles were over. Nobody in the family suspected that there was something between them. After my father's departure they started writing letters to one



another. Mamma says she was missing my father a lot. My father demobilized after some time and he got an assignment as chairman of the catering department in Berdichev. He came to Gaisin to my grandparents' house and said that he wanted to marry their daughter. He got very pale as he said this. They got silent for about five minutes and then my grandmother went to the kitchen to cook and bake for the occasion. They didn't have a chuppah, as my father was a very progressive man and an atheist and he even thought they didn't have to register their marriage. My grandfather Moisey said to him: 'Well, there are new rules and new laws. We live in a new state. And we must observe its laws. You will go to Berdichev to start your own life there. What you should do is to go to the relevant office and find out how they register marriages. You need to remember your wedding.' My parents got married on 26th August 1923 at the registration office in Berdichev. They didn't have a proper wedding, they just registered their marriage. We spoke Russian at home. My grandmother spoke Yiddish and so did my parents when they talked with her.

They rented a room from an actress of the Berdichev Jewish Theater. Mother told me that at that time Meyerhold and Mikhoels [9](#) and other theater troupes came on tour to Berdichev and they always went to the performances, as my father had a subscription. My father protected my mother from all hardships at the beginning, he even didn't want her to cook and they dined in restaurants. Later my mother realized that the fiesta was over and ordinary routine family life came in its place.

Their daughter Rosa was born in 1925. In the first years of their common life my mother did all the housework. They were better off than their parents, and they usually had my mother's brothers visiting them and my mother fed them up every now and then. My mother was very worried that she didn't continue her studies. But my father promised her that she would continue her studies later when their daughter was a little older and things became easier.

Later my father got a job offer in Kiev. In the early 1930s he became director of the Rosa Luxembourg Knitwear Factory in Kiev. He worked in this position until 1938. When they moved to Kiev they rented a small room (14 m<sup>2</sup>) in Nikolaevskaya Street in the very center of the city. They had a very happy life. My father was a sociable man, they often had guests - his co-workers and friends -, and they often went to see relatives and friends. But then my sister Roza fell ill all of a sudden in 1929. She had a splitting headache and they couldn't understand what it was. She had fever for three days in a row and the doctors' diagnosis was meningitis. She died within a week. It was a terrible tragedy. My father was busy at work, so he took it easier. But my mother was at home and she couldn't bear it. And then my father told her to go to study. He said to her that she was still young and that she always wanted to study. She had her graduation certificate and a certificate confirming that she finished one year at the Medical Institute. She submitted these documents to the Kiev Light Industry Institute and was admitted. She was a very good student and enjoyed studying.

Her parents and their children lived in Nikopol at the Jewish collective farm [10](#). My grandfather had heart problems after the loss of his parents and sisters. It became very hard for him to work. Grigoriy Reznik, their oldest son, got married in 1927 and lived in Astrakhan with his wife Hanna. There were two younger children: Boris and Emil Reznik. It was necessary to give them an education. At first they sent Boris to Kiev. He went to work at a construction site and entered the Rabfak [11](#). Emil was at the Jewish boarding school in Nikopol. Later my grandmother wrote my mother that all teachers said he was very talented and he needed to go on with his studies. My mother and father decided to have their parents and Emil move to them. The three of them joined

my parents in this small room. They settled down somehow and got along very well. Emil went to work at the musical instrument factory when he was 14 and entered trade school. My grandmother helped at home and my grandfather got a job at the bakery. Once some big boss visited my father. He saw all these shoes in the hallway and when he entered the room he couldn't count all the people there. He said such living conditions were inappropriate for the director of a factory. Then my father received a two-room apartment, also with neighbors (two families) in Mikhailovskaya Street. When he saw this apartment, it seemed almost a palace to him. All of them moved into this new apartment. This was in 1934. In 1938 grandfather Moisey died.

When Kharkov became the capital of Ukraine, the Institute of Light Industry moved there as well and my mother left there to finish her studies. My father often went to see her at this town. After her very successful graduation she got an assignment to the Knitwear Headquarters.

This was during the Stalinist repressions [the so-called Great Terror] [12](#). Kleiner, a Jew, chief engineer of the factory where my father was director, was imprisoned, as well as Lemberskaya, secretary of the factory's party organization. The operations manager (her husband was secretary of the Kiev regional party committee) was also imprisoned. He was arrested before her. They had two children that were probably taken to a special institution for the children of the 'enemies of the people'.

My mother told me that my father seemed to be protected by the Lord. For some reason, the 'black crow' arrived during the night from Saturday to Sunday. [Editor's note: In the USSR and the Soviet satellites state security police used to come to arrest people and take them to prison late at night or at dawn. The black cars that the police drove were called 'black crow'.] And my father tried to go out of town on Saturday and Sunday, especially in the summer. Once he was sent to an international exhibition in Paris, France. He was the only representative from Ukraine in the delegation of the Soviet Union. They made special suits for all members of the delegation. My father came to Moscow and it turned out that he wasn't on the list, for some unknown reason. He was very upset and returned home. About a year later he found out that all of those who were in this delegation had been imprisoned. That he was safe was a mystery. Some people even thought that he was either a traitor or had some ties at the NKVD [13](#). In 1939 he got promoted to the position of head of the Knitwear Headquarters.

I was born on 15th August 1939. My coming into this world was a great event for my family and all those around them. My mother says that she received baskets of flowers. They also brought me knitted clothes (from the Knitwear Headquarters).

My mother's brother Boris worked at a construction site and became a Komsomol [14](#) member. Unfortunately, he didn't study. There was a campaign then called Komsomol members into commerce. And he was made director of a store in Kiev. He was dating a girl - her name was Sonia. She was 18 and an orphan and she lived with her sister. Once my mother came home from work and saw Boris and Sonia sitting at the table. There was a bottle of wine and some snacks on the table. They said to my mother, 'Come, sit down and have a drink with us'. My mother did so.

Some time passed, and my uncle Boris was recruited to the army. He served in the vicinity of Moscow. Then one day a letter came from him. He asked his mother to let Sonia move in with them, as living with her sister's family was very hard for her. So, Sonia moved in with us. And then it turned out that on that day, when they were sitting and drinking, they got married, but somehow

they didn't want to tell anyone, although nobody would have been against this marriage. After Boris returned from the army they had a son called Garik. He lived for 8 months and died, either from angina or diphtheria. At that time uncle Boris (he was director of the store) rented a room, and their family left our house.

My mother's brother Emil entered the Footwear Technology Department at the Light Industry Institute. He met his future wife there. She was Russian. Her name was Zhenia Zhaboyedova. He married her and moved to live with her and her parents in their apartment.

Grigoriy married a Jewish girl, Hanna, in 1927. They went to Astrakhan after their wedding because her family had moved there. Uncle Grigoriy became a photographer and worked as photographer there. Their son Romochka was born in 1929. He lives in Berezniaki, close to where we live in Kiev. Before 1941, the beginning of the war, all relatives on my mother's side lived in Kiev - only uncle Grigoriy was in Astrakhan with his family.

The war began on 22nd June 1941. Uncle Boris was summoned to the army almost immediately. Uncle Emil was in the army in Vladimir-Volynsk at this time. His wife Zhenia was in Kiev, and Boris's wife (she already had a second daughter, Marochka) was also in Kiev. My father was mobilized to evacuate the Ukrainian knitwear industry. Before his departure, he told us to get ready to evacuate. My mother and grandmother, two daughters-in-law, my cousin Marochka, Lilia, my father's niece, and I got on the train. The train slowly went to Kharkov. There was a bombing there and we had to change trains.

My father was in Poltava [350 km from Kiev]. He left on the last train, after he evacuated the knitwear factory from there. My mother was at a loss. She didn't know in what direction we should proceed. Then they decided that Astrakhan was too far away for the Germans to cover, and that they should go to my mother's brother Grigoriy. This was the right decision. We went to our family, and they met us, and accommodated us nicely. Uncle Grigoriy was working. We didn't know anything about Boris and Emil. We were especially afraid for Emil, because at the beginning of the war he was in Vladimir-Volynsk, close to the border. The Germans occupied this town at the beginning of the war. My grandmother used to go to the trains that brought the wounded military, and she kept asking, 'Have you seen Reznik? Have you heard of Reznik?' We stayed for about two months in Astrakhan, and then my father got a job as director of the stocking factory in Chimkent, in Kazakhstan. He came to take us there. The three of us went with him: my mother, my grandmother and I.

In Chimkent we got accommodation in a small house on the factory site. My mother wanted her daughters-in-law to join us, and aunt Sonia and Marochka and Zhenia arrived within two or three weeks. The Germans were advancing. Uncle Grigoriy was recruited to the army. Aunt Hanna stayed in Astrakhan with Romochka. Later they joined us in Chimkent.

Eleven of us occupied two rooms in this house in evacuation. I'd like to say we all had wonderful relationships that were an example for us for the rest of our lives. Although our father was director of the factory, we didn't have enough food. My mother said we ate meals from flour and water and cooked some local turtles. My grandmother went to the market to exchange things for food. She first tried to get a few lumps of sugar for the children. Aunt Sonia worked as a cashier and my mother worked in the planning department at the factory. Zhenia worked as an accountant. Those were very hard years, but people always got together at our place for a cup of tea. We girls recited



poems and sang songs. We knew all the wartime songs. My children also know them. We like these songs.

Then we heard from Uncle Emil. The Germans encircled his unit. He was a tank man. He drowned his tank and they were moving at night. It was a miracle that he got out of the encirclement and joined our army. He came to Chimkent for a few days and then he finished a tank college in Sverdlovsk and stayed there to lecture at the college. After the war Emil (and his family) lived in Kiev for many years, he taught at the Kiev Tank College. He died in 2000.

Uncle Grigoriy was in the vicinity of Stalingrad and lived through all the horror and hell of Stalingrad. [Editor's note: The Battle of Stalingrad took place in WWII between Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviets turned the Germans back at Stalingrad between 1942-43.] He was shell-shocked and then he got spotted fever. After the liberation of Stalingrad he was demobilized and came to stay with us. On his way he repeatedly got spotted fever. He arrived in 1944 and he looked absolutely terrible. We kids remember him collecting crumbs from the table to eat them. He had hungry eyes, but he felt very shy about eating. It took him some time to recover, and he left for the town of Mary with Aunt Hanna and Roma. His friends lived there and they helped him to find a job. They lived there until the end of the war. After the war they lived in the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan for about ten years and then returned to Kiev. Uncle Grigoriy died in 1983.

Uncle Boris was wounded, but went through the whole war, and finished it in Austria. He came to Kiev to pick up his family in August 1945. Boris was awarded the Red Star Order. He served in our army in Romania until 1947. His daughter Sveta was born there. Their family returned to their small apartment in Kiev, where they had lived before the war.

After the war Boris worked as director of a store. They lived a difficult life because of their terrible living conditions. They had a 16m<sup>2</sup> room. His wife's sister (she'd lost her husband to the war) and her daughter were living with them. She was mentally ill and couldn't work. There were six of them living in this small room. The children went to school. Uncle Boris had a very stressful job, his wife Sonia was very ill and didn't work. It was worse than hell. Uncle Boris came back from the war a different person. He had been a jovial man before the war. But after the war he became very nervous, everybody irritated him, even the children. His older daughter Marochka cried sometimes saying, 'Why did you come, I'd rather live with Uncle Pavlusha'. In the late 1950s they received an apartment. It was a small apartment in a Khrushchovka [15](#), which had a small kitchen, shower, no bathtub, and a small toilet. But they were all so happy. Boris died in 1972.

We returned to Kiev in April 1945. When it was liberated, my father submitted requests to the authorities to be allowed to return to Kiev from Chimkent. The climate in Middle Asia did not agree with him. He started having problems with his heart. But he was only allowed to leave after they found a replacement for him. We traveled to Kiev via Moscow. My father was an official and he was supposed to obtain a job assignment in Moscow.

In Moscow we stayed at the place of my father's brother, Uncle Matvey. I remember my impressions of Moscow. I was too young when we left Kiev and I didn't remember it. Our life in Chimkent was very poor, and Moscow seemed to me an incredible fairy-tale. My father and I went to visit Kleiner, his former chief engineer. He was an old type specialist, one of those pre-revolutionary technicians. He graduated from an educational institution in Germany. He was arrested in 1937 [during the Great Terror] but was released soon after. He didn't want to come

back to work at the factory so he went to Moscow. His son lived in Moscow. When I saw their apartment in Moscow - the cupboard, dishes, a piano and curtains on the windows - I thought it couldn't be true.

My father got an assignment as director of the Rosa Luxembourg factory, same as before the war, and we went to Kiev. Unfortunately, our pre-war apartment was occupied by the head of the militia unit, and my father realized that no documents or evidence would be enough to get this apartment back. At that time Zhenia, uncle Emil's wife, lived in Kiev and worked as instructor of at a district party committee. She lived in a two-room apartment. She let us one of her rooms and we lived there. My father went to work. But in August a former neighbor came and told us that the militia official got an assignment to another town. My father had things arranged at the executive committee and we moved into our pre-war apartment.

My father was director, my mother didn't work, my grandmother was taking care of the housekeeping, and life seemed to be nice and wonderfully beautiful. However, in the late 1940s my father had a feeling that things at his work were becoming more complicated. District and regional party committees and the ministry were constantly finding fault with his work. My father stayed at the factory day and night. One afternoon we had a phone call when we were sitting at the dinner table. My father had an infarction. This was the first alarm that work became more difficult for him. My mother and I went to take him home - he wasn't taken to hospital. My father submitted a request to the ministry to find another position. At this time the first knitwear shop was to be opened in Kiev. My father was involved in its organization and became its director. He put a lot of effort into the construction of this shop. He invited a good architect and went to Moscow and Riga to find out about business. When this shop was opened it became an elite shop. They tailored dresses and shirts and underwear. It became very popular. My father tried to satisfy the requirements of the wives of the party officials.

Then, in the early 1950s, they started finding fault with him again. Some high-standing lady bought a piece of underwear in the shop and came back the next day to return it. My father explained to her that she couldn't return underwear. She sniffed scornfully and said to him that he would be sorry for refusing her. Some time later my father was summoned to the district party committee, and they accused him of absolutely incredible things. They decided to expel him from the Party. This was a directly anti-Semitic action. My father was so taken aback that he couldn't say a word in his defense. There was a worker from the Arsenal Plant [the Arsenal Camera and Optics Plant in Kiev] at that meeting. And, when they were voting to expel my father from the Party, he said, 'Look here, what are we doing? He became a party member before we were born!' My father was reprimanded and fired from work. But he couldn't accept it. He kept writing complaints to the authorities in Kiev, Moscow, to the local and central offices. He suffered even more from getting this reprimand than for losing his job. Actually, our family didn't have any means of existence. My mother went to work and worked in the clothing department until she turned 63. My father struggled for the truth for four years, but then he calmed down. Later he received a personal pension, as he was an old Bolshevik (it was a sufficient amount for that time) and stopped thinking about work.

My father understood very well that it was an anti-Semitic campaign. But he thought that Stalin didn't know anything about the repression in the 1930s or the anti-Semitism of the early 1950s. My father thought there were no real communists and that people joined the party to make a career.

Communist ideals were sacred for him until his last days. He was sure that the Soviet government did much for the Jewish people and used to say, 'You should have seen the poverty in which Jewish people lived before the Revolution'. My mother's opinion was different. She thought Jewish people had a better life before the Revolution. However, she accepted his opinion - mainly because she was in love with him and thought that he was always right. Basically, he was the ideological leader of the family.

After Stalin's death my father's friends returned from prisons. They told us about the horrendous years they spent there. My father didn't have a moment's doubt about his friends' innocence.

The first one to return was Alexeyeva. She had been operations manager at my father's factory. She was Jewish and her husband was Russian. When she entered our house my mother didn't recognize her. She was wearing some awful jacket and boots. She had been somewhere in Siberia and had only survived because she had worked as a housemaid in the home of the boss in their prison. This was all hard to imagine. My mother told me what a luxurious life they had lived before the war. When my mother saw her she burst into tears, and so did all those standing around. But Alexeyeva was a courageous woman. Her priority was to find her children. She never found her daughter. But she found her son living in Uzbekistan. She was allowed to live in Ukraine, but not in Kiev. She went to Cherkassy with her son. She corresponded with us. When my father died she wrote that he was a decent and honest man.

Then Lemberskaya, the party unit secretary of the factory, returned. She went to live in Chernigov. But she was affected by the years spent in prison. She became mentally ill and was put into a mental hospital in Kiev where she died.

In 1946 I went to school. I also attended a music school. About 30% of our class was Jewish. I never felt that the non-Jews treated us differently. There was only one unpleasant episode in the music school. I was in the 2nd grade at music school. I was to perform at the summary concert in the conservatory. I was to play the Dancing Piece by Berkovich. And then, my teacher told me that I was not approved to perform at the concert. She said it was because of the title of the piece that I was to play. I was aware of anti-Semitism then and I understood well why this piece by a Jewish composer was not approved. I had a wonderful teacher - Sophia Gelfand, a Jew. Almost all teachers at the music school were Jewish.

I finished school in 1956. I had all A's and only one C, on my certificate. My documents were submitted to the municipal education committee to approve my receiving a silver medal. But all of a sudden the authorities issued a decree that a medal could be awarded only to those pupils who had no satisfactory grades during their study at school. In our register for the 9th grade they found one satisfactory mark in physics and my name was not approved for the silver medal. That was when I directly faced anti-Semitism.

I submitted my documents to the Construction Institute. I passed the written test in mathematics with an excellent mark, then composition with a good mark, and the next was an oral test in physics. I answered all questions, but the examiner gave me the lowest grade. We had an acquaintance working in the military faculty at this institute and he told my father that Jews were not admitted to the institute. My father managed to find me a position as apprentice in the design department at the Darnitsa silk factory. It took me over an hour to get there. I also attended a preparatory course to the Extramural Institute of the Textile and Light Industry. They had an

affiliate in Kiev, but then they moved to Moscow and I finished it in Moscow. I became a mechanical engineer. I worked as a designer my whole life, but I didn't enjoy it.

My father died in 1969. My grandmother, my mother's mother, died the same year. My mother reached an old age with a sound mind. She died in 1995.

My personal life is quite happy. I met my husband Leonid Fishel, born in 1937, at the institute. We got married when we were 4th year students. Leonid was raised in a very intelligent Jewish family in Kiev. The family of my husband's parents was not religious. His father worked as a chief engineer at one of the greater plants in Kiev. He died there in the 1960s. His mother was a home-maker, she lived to a ripe old age and died in 1988. His younger sister Sonya left for Israel in the 1970s and lives there with their two children and grandsons. Leonid worked as an engineer in light industry enterprises. We have two nice children.

Our older son Timur was born in 1962. He finished school in 1979. We understood that it was impossible for a Jew to enter a higher educational institute in Kiev. We were afraid that he would be recruited to the army. At this time it was all very scary because of anti-Semitism and terrible attitudes. I took him to Tallinn, Estonia. He entered the Energy Department of the Polytechnic Institute there. He got married in Tallinn. His wife's mother is Estonian. Her father is Lithuanian. She has Poles, Russians and Lithuanians in her family - any nationality, but Jewish. When Timur studied in Kiev he had Ukrainian, Jewish and Russian friends. He didn't choose his friends by their nationality. In Tallinn he had mainly Jewish co-students. He has a very good sense of music. He sings songs in Yiddish. He even gives concerts in Yiddish. He receives invitations from the Kiev Jewish Cultural Center and gives concerts there. This year he took part in the festival of Klezmer music in Evpatoria [in the Crimea].

Timur has two children - a son, Mark, and a daughter, Tatiana. Tatiana studies at the Jewish school. Timur goes to the synagogue and celebrates traditional Jewish holidays at home. But I can't say that he's a religious man. He just identifies himself as a real Jew. His wife has no objections. She thinks that each person must live the way they think is right.

Our second son, Pavel, was born in 1971. He was a talented boy. He studied music and then began to draw. He was good at both but he chose drawing. He studied at a studio and had private teachers. Then he decided to enter the Republican Art School, although they didn't admit Jews. In 1990 (after perestroika began) Pavel entered the Theatrical Department at the Art Institute and graduated from it successfully.

When he was studying at the art school, Pavel got interested in philosophy and religions. He started buying books by Russian and other philosophers when he was 13 or 14 years old. He started from the Christian religion and then turned to Judaism. My husband and I are atheists and it seemed strange to us. In 1994 Pavel was circumcised and took the name Pinhos in my father's honor. Nowadays Pavel studies Hebrew. He goes to the synagogue and celebrates Sabbath. We also became interested in Jewish life along with him. My husband and I read Jewish newspapers and attend the Jewish charity center, Hesed. It's a pity that it took us so long to start identifying ourselves as Jews. I say my prayer on Friday and light a candle. We try to observe kashrut. Unfortunately we have never been to Israel, but I hope that we shall go there one day.

Well, it so happened that our children introduced us to the Jewish life. We didn't have it when we were young. Regrettably, Jewish traditions have not been kept in my family and in my husband's family. We were always Soviet people, atheists. We couldn't tell anybody that. Now we observe Sabbath and the Jewish holidays. In the Soviet Union this was forbidden and persecuted by the power. Literature on these subjects wasn't allowed to be published and we weren't allowed to hear anything. But if I'm honest, I didn't really want this. Now it's different. Everything is available. Different Jewish societies have opened, synagogues - and this is splendid! And I like it.

## Glossary

### **1 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.

### **2 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

### **3 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)**

White Army general. During the Russian Civil War he fought against the Red Army in the South of Ukraine.

### **4 Collectivization in the USSR**

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

### **5 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.

## **6 Whites (White Army)**

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

## **7 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

## **8 Greens**

members of the gang headed by Ataman Zeleniy (his nickname means 'green' in Russian).

## **9 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

## **10 Jewish collective farms**

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

## **11 Rabfak**

Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.

## **12 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.

### **13 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

### **14 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.

### **15 Khrushchovka**

Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in in the new neighborhood of Kiev.