# Elizaveta Valueva

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St. Petersburg
Russia
Interviewer: Anna Nerush

I was born on January 25, 1936, in *Mariupol*, Ukraine. My mother, Anna Samuelovna Blinderman, was born in 1914 in the village of *Buki*, Cherkassia region, Ukraine. My father, Pavel Alekseevich Valuev, was born in Russia, in the village of *Kashidra*, Moscow region, in 1910. I studied in Moscow at the Institute of Energy from 1953 to 1958. After graduation I married Anatoly Pavlovich Nikolau. He was born in 1934, and died in 1987. With him I returned to Mariupol, where I lived until 2000. After the deaths of all my other relatives, I was alone, and I moved to St. Petersburg to live with my son. In Mariupol I worked as the head of a department of Ukrgypromez, the Ukrainian Institute of entrepreneurial planning for black metallurgy, from 1968 to 1974. From 1974 to 1990, I was the head of a department of the Central Scientific Research Laboratory of black metallurgy. I am now retired.



**My family background**

My son, Sergei Anatolievich Nikolau, was born on December 1, 1960. He is a neurologist and works at a hospital in St. Petersburg. I have three grandchildren: Pavel, who is 17; Yekaterina, 9; and Polina, 9 months.

My family, the Blinderman-Valuev family, without exaggeration, could be considered a model of unity between representatives of two nations, in this case Russian and Jewish. My father and my spouse not only respected, were devoted to and loved their Jewish wives, but also, through the course of their lives, took care of many of their wives' Jewish relatives. After World War II and because of the difficulty with housing, my mother's relatives lived in our apartment until they received lodging, and my mother's spinster sister, Klara Blinderman, lived with my mother's family for 23 years. When my mother had trouble getting over the death of her husband, my husband, Anatoly Nikolau, spent the most time with her. Every evening he took her out for a walk, obtained everything needed for her handiwork so that she could take her mind off painful memories, and so on.

The harmonious, respectful and warm atmosphere of the Blinderman-Valuev family is not only tolerance between nations, but more of a national compatibility, formed so that both I and my son - whose passport says his "nationality" is "Russian" - could feel close to the Jewish nation. Because I

have Slavic features, I would not be associated with having a Jewish background. At every new place of work, I immediately mentioned my Jewish roots on my mother's side, to forestall any incidents of anti-Semitism in my presence.

Me and my son's feelings toward Judaism are worth mentioning because neither I nor my son received a religious upbringing. Rather, we lived, one could say, amid a Soviet upbringing. Thanks to the harmonious relationships between the older generations of both the Jewish and Russian sides of our family - for me the happy marriage of my parents, and for my son the wonderful relationship between me and my spouse - my son and I - especially me - having lived our adult lives in the second half of the 20th century, had a unique opportunity to create our own family barrier against anti-
Semitism, which had been growing in the Soviet Union over many decades, to the level of governmental politics and therefore was constantly at the everyday level.

We were able to form this barrier against the governmental and everyday anti-Semitism by talking with our older relatives. They shared their memories of the world before the war. My mother's parents were Brana Peisekhovna Shavulskaya, who lived from 1888 to 1975, and Shmul Josefovich Blinderman, who lived from 1888 to 1942. Grandmother was courageous, hardworking, kind, enduring, a soul strong, moderately commanding. Grandfather was quiet, taciturn, mild, indistinctive in the best sense of the word.

They lived in the Ukrainian village of Buki in the Umanskovo sector of the Cherkassia region in the Ukraine, and their way of life was dual to a certain extent: While remaining Jewish in their religious worldview, in outward appearance - clothing and the presence of some local dialect in their spoken language - they became to a certain degree like the Ukrainians. Grandmother, from her youth and until the end of her days, wore a long and broad skirt, a cardigan, and tied a shawl around her head. Outwardly, she didn't differ from the Ukrainian women of her village.
In the 1960s, my mother, Anna, gave her a wool jacket as a gift, and Grandmother wore this with unusual pride. I remember Grandfather in a dark jacket and always a dark shirt. He had neither a beard nor moustache.

Neither Grandmother nor Grandfather obtained any sort of education; a fact that was quite understandable given the position of Jews in a Ukrainian village at the turn of the century. They lived in chronic destitution.

They had six children. Grandfather sewed hats in the small Ukrainian town of Shpola; the family moved there from Buki. Grandmother did day labor as a field worker. She gave birth to one of her six children right in a field. There was only one svitka for the entire family; because of this, the children went to school during the cold time of year in turn.

Grandmother was more observant than Grandfather. She got together to pray with other inhabitants in Shpola. After the war, in Mariupol, she regularly attended the prayer house that took the place of a traditional synagogue in that city.

**During the war**

During the civil war, Grandmother lived through fires in her own clay house that were set twice by bandits. During one of the pogroms, the Makhno bandits killed three of her brothers before her

very eyes, and the fourth - Moishe - was badly hurt. Grandmother was able to save Moishe and care for him. In 1919 Moishe left for the United States with other relatives - I don't know their names - and Grandmother's sister, Klara, emigrated to Palestine that same year.

Fleeing from the Makhno band during one of the numerous Jewish pogroms during the civil war, my pregnant grandmother ran barefooted with her children in her arms over a field to an acquaintance who was not Jewish and who hid her and her children in a bundle of hay. The bandits, with cries and threats, threw themselves at the homeowner, demanding to be told where the runaways were. The owner made the bandits believe there were no strangers on his property. After poking the bundles of hay with spikes and thankfully not piercing Grandmother or her children, the bandits disappeared. It seemed that the Almighty himself protected that exceptional woman and her children. The strength of soul and kindness of Brana Peisekhovna couldn't help but bring sympathy and respect from her non - Jewish neighbors who, as I have already said, came to her aid. In saving her and her children, these people regularly risked their own lives.

After the beginning of World War II, when she had not had any chance to make evacuation plans, Grandmother, in my opinion, did another heroic feat, although she herself thought that she was just doing her duty as a wife and grandmother. After loading her ill husband, suffering from a lacerated stomach ulcer, into a wheelbarrow, she and her 3-year-old granddaughter set out on foot on the many-kilometer path to the Dniper River. After crossing the river on a raft, she found her daughter Fira, the granddaughter's mother, in Kharkov and they were evacuated together. She received a pension after the war, because of her son's death at the front, and she regularly gave her portion to the Jewish prayer house to help those families who had also lost their provider.

From the stories of relatives and my conversations with her, I place Grandmother in the ranks of unique personalities in terms of soul, strength, self-sacrifice to the point of self-denial, relationships to her husband, children and comrades in faith. Unbelievable bravery and optimistic belief in a happy ending, it seems, gave her the strength to fight for the survival of her family, both during the evil years of the civil war in Russia and during the years of indigence and oppression that accompanied the anti-Semitism of the Soviet period. It gave her the strength to live through even the years of the Holocaust. The Russian part of our family - my father, spouse and their relatives - loved and respected our grandmother, admiring her as much as her close Jewish family.

The only Jewish holiday that was celebrated at home during my grandmother's life and after her death was Passover. Already living in Mariupol after the war, Grandmother would buy a chicken at the market long before Passover and feed it on the balcony. Then, not long before the holiday she would take the chicken to the butcher. There was no synagogue in Buki, in the settlement of Shpola, where my grandmother and her family lived before the war, or in Mariupol. Matzot were baked at home by practicing Jews. Brana Peisekhovna enlisted all the females of our family for this ritual - adults and girls. Two types of matzot were baked on two wooden benches, with eggs and without. On Passover, a celebratory dinner was held, to which not only Jews, but also Russian Orthodox relatives were invited, as well as neighboring non-Jews.

I have always had a feeling of deep gratitude to my parents for the atmosphere in our family of national harmony between Jews and Russians, for the patience and tolerance with which they lived through difficult times and the unavoidable problems connected with civil cataclysms. Great love was the solid foundation not only for their marriage, but also for our Jewish-Russian clan. In the

post-war housing crisis, my parents had seven people living in our little, two-room apartment.

My father graduated from the Moscow Institute of Agricultural Electrification and worked his whole life at the Azovstal factory, first as an engineer and then as the assistant head power-engineering specialist and head of the central laboratory. He worked enthusiastically, giving his all to his beloved work. During the war he was released from the draft because he was sent to Siberia, to the city of Stalinsk, to organize the defense industry there.

After finishing diplomatic school in Kiev before the war, my father refused a prestigious post in New Zealand, explaining that he "couldn't stay for long without the guardianship of the many Jewish relatives of my wife." Father was an atheist, which didn't stop him, a Russian, from respecting the religious passion of his mother-in-law and the people that surrounded her. Father died in Mariupol in 1968, mourned by all of us, both his Russian and Jewish relatives.

My mother was born in Buki. She first got on a train when she was 15, in 1929. Mother graduated from a pharmaceutical institute in Dnipropetrovsk. She lived in a dormitory in very difficult conditions, up to 30 people in one room. The years of my mother's study coincided with the period of complete famine in the Ukraine, and students who couldn't be helped by their parents were hit particularly hard. Before the war, from 1935 to 1941, and after the war, until 1968, Mother worked in pharmacies in Mariupol. During the first post-war years, she traveled by cart to all nearby villages to put the village pharmacies in working order.

**After the war**

Those who lived in the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1950s, and those who only heard or read about this frightening time can imagine the condition of my family during this time, when my mother - a pharmacist by profession - was discriminated against simply because her nationality was the same as the nationality of those high-ranking doctors who were part of the "Doctors affair." The suffering of my mother and all our family was intensified by the atmosphere of mistrust and unproven accusations against any doctor or pharmacist with Jewish traits as well as the slanderous verbal attacks that malicious residents directed toward them.

Remembering atheism - an intrinsic and unavoidable part of the ideology preached by the USSR - I recall with some sadness how my mother, not long before her death, came to realize her belief in God, openly lamenting that it occurred so late in her life.

The history of all generations of my family, both sides: Jewish and Ukrainian, is permanently connected with the city of Mariupol, where the older generation spent most of their lives, and my generation and our children spent our whole lives. Mariupol is a very unique city compared to other Ukrainian cities. This is because it was founded by emigrants from Greece. Even in the 20th century, a portion of the residents were Greeks.
I don't know the statistics; I can only say that Jews in the city, before and after the war, were numerous. Jews first came to Mariupol following the Greeks, drawn by the trade opportunities and the relative proximity to Odessa and other ports in the Black Sea.

Pre-war Mariupol was a typical provincial town. Residential buildings were mostly two stories. My parents said that before the war there were only two five-story buildings in Mariupol. Horses and carts were the usual mode of transportation, even in the post-war period, after the city was

liberated from the fascists. In pre-war Mariupol, there was no electricity, no piped water or sewage system. Candles were used for lighting. During the period of famine, from 1932 to 1934 and after, people baked their bread themselves from poor quality grain. After the war, when there was both electricity and water, I, and members of my family who were my age, often complained about the difficulties, the constant deficit of foodstuffs. My wise Jewish grandmother would cut off our complaints and we fell silent. "Don't complain!" Grandmother would say, "You have piped water, and you don't need to carry a yoke with buckets. You have electricity and you don't live by candlelight. You buy bread in the store and don't have to bake it from discarded grain."

My closest relatives, including my mother, couldn't remember the appearance of anti-Semitism before the war. If they did encounter it, then it was only sporadically, and most often, the people around them sided with them.

In the post-war period, Mariupol transformed its look and status, becoming an industrial city, thanks to such giants as the Azovstal factory. All ofthis couldn't help but influence the spread of culture, education and changed in the relationships between the citizens of Mariupol.
Having been raised by my family in a spirit of tolerance of other nationalities, but at the same time being proud of my connection to the Jewish nation on my mother's side, when I was 15 I met a young Russian - Anatoly Nikolau. We became friends, and eventually, when, in the late 1950s we both finished the Moscow Institute of Energetics, we married and moved back to Mariupol. During the 29 years of our marriage, and after my husband passed away in 1987, I thanked fate for the fact that I, in my youth, had made the right choice. My spouse was devoted not only to me and our son,

but also to my parents whom he treated like his own closest relatives. He was diagnosed at the age of 37 with stomach ulcers; he suffered the chronic pain in silence, afraid to worry my mother and me. Mother was so grateful to my husband for the support that he gave her after the death of my father that she traveled with me to Donetsk, where Anatoly was facing difficult surgery. My Jewish mother kept watch at her Russian son-in-law's bedside for a month.

Because I formed my identity in a Jewish family, with acquaintances, colleagues and neighbors of other nationalities, observing Jewish traditions seemed to me to be an essential attribute of my international family. And when changes in our country's life began in the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, connected with a greater openness and respect for the other faiths, except Russian Orthodox, we all - Jews and half-Jews, culturally Russian and Ukrainian residents of Mariupol - welcomed the opening a few years ago of the first synagogue in the city, not minding that it was in a mere two classrooms of one of the city schools. I regretted the fact that my religious grandmother hadn't lived to this blessed time, when she could have regularly and openly attended synagogue. It is possible that even my mother would have come to believe in God not at the end of her life, in 1998, but much earlier had a legally functioning synagogue existed in the city. And it goes without saying that her correspondence with her close relatives who had emigrated to the USA and Palestine in 1919 would have been carried out not only by Grandmother, hidden from us, but also by my mother and myself - the younger generations of the family. The correspondence would have eagerly opened for us, possibly, a completely new world.

In the last decade of the 20th century, the religious life of the Jews of Mariupol blossomed, although unfortunately there were noticeably fewer Jews in the city. The synagogue drew in both elderly

Orthodox and young believers, and the organization of a local Hesed and the Sochnut created the possibility for educational and entertainment events for the Jews and non-Jews. Volunteer work has also been set up.

Jews emigrated to Israel, the USA and Germany. Many young people left Mariupol to study in Israel. Jews traveling from Mariupol to Israel to visit and Israelis to Mariupol played a specific and positive role - there was a rise in interest in life in Israel. Often one could even see how non- Jewish residents eagerly questioned those returning from visits to Israel, and didn't hide their admiration.