

# Dora Nisman

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Chernovtsy

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Orlicova

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Dorah Nisman is a 90-year-old woman but she is a cheerful and dignified person and has her own opinion in regards to what is happening in the world. She is very sociable and enjoys talking to people visiting her in Lvov. She speaks fluent Yiddish and has quite a few visitors interested in the language. She lives in a cozy and clean apartment. She doesn't go out due to her age. She has a social worker from Hesed helping her about the house. She has many friends and interests despite her age.

My family came from Moldavia. My father, Moshe-Joseph Waisman, was born in the village of Kushnirka on the bank of the Dnestr river in 1873. There were quite a few Jews in the area that formed Jewish neighborhoods in villages and towns.

I know about my grandfather, Srul Waisman, from what my father told me. My grandfather was born in the early 1850s. He finished cheder. When he was 16 or 17 he got married to a girl from a neighboring village. The girl was about 15 years old. Such marriages were customary at the time. It was also common that a bride and bridegroom didn't know each other before the wedding. My grandfather got a small store from his father that remained his business for the rest of his life. He was selling food products and essential commodities. He could provide well for his family. He was a deeply religious and respectable man. My father told me that his father's house was near the synagogue, which was a special honor.

My grandmother, Mariam Waisman, was a housewife. She had many children. A few of them died at birth. I've never heard anything about my father's brothers or sisters and don't know what happened to them. My grandmother also helped her husband in the store. She died in 1910. My grandfather died in the early 1920s. By that time the village of Kushnirka belonged to the Soviet Union. Our family lived in Romania since 1918. After World War I a part of the Russian territory was transferred to Rumania, including our village.

My father left the village at 15. He lived and worked in stores in many towns in Moldavia. Later my father became 'a neymener wald' [Yiddish for assistant forest administrator]. Foresters and accountants reported to my father. He was also responsible for the woodcutting in forests. He supervised the removal of dry branches from trees. I visited my father at his workplace in the forest twice. I saw him weigh a cart full of dry branches on ground scales. He received payments from locals for these branches. At the end of each month he gave this money to the administrator. The administrator and my father were Jews, janitors and branch cutters were non-Jews. The owner of the forest was a Jew, too. His last name was Waisman, but he wasn't related to us. When the removal of dry branches was over in one area they moved to another. My father stayed in nearby villages. During his stay in Slobodzeya my father met the daughter of the local chazzan, Nakhman

Berkovich. My father and the girl liked each other.

Nakhman Berkovich, born in the 1850s, was a deeply religious man. Before giving his consent to his daughter's marriage he checked my father's knowledge of the Torah and religious books. My father must have had good teachers in the cheder, as he passed this test successfully. Nakhman gave his consent to his daughter's marriage.

His daughter, Feige-Shyfra, born in 1878, married my father in 1896. They had their wedding in Slobodzeya, a beautiful village with many gardens and trees. Jews didn't have their own neighborhood in this village. They lived alongside Ukrainians and Moldavians. My parents had a traditional wedding. I've been to quite a few traditional weddings and can imagine very well what it was like.

My grandmother on my mother's side, Rivke Berkovich, was born in Slobodzeya in 1858. She was a typical Jewish wife, who took care of her husband, children and the house. She observed all Jewish laws and traditions. She had no education, but was a wise advisor on everyday issues to her neighbors, regardless of their nationality. I saw my grandmother once or twice in my life. She was a cheerful and hard-working woman. She always wore a white kerchief. She died in 1920. The mail services were slow at that time, and we only received notification about her death quite some time after her death. I believe she had eleven children, but I only remember two of them. Her younger daughter, Livsha, born in 1888, lived with her parents in Slobodzeya. She was a dressmaker. She perished during the occupation in the 1940s. Her son, Syoma, was the only survivor of the family. He was at the front during the war. Now he lives in Israel. My mother also had an older brother, Avrum. He lived in Balta, but I never met him.

After my father got married he continued traveling from one town to another, and his family followed him. I remember the Regat, Tansa and Basesti in Romania. My family observed all traditions and celebrated holidays. Even in villages with few Jews they rented a house from Romanians, whitewashed it and arranged a praying house. Jews got together in a minyan. My father's Hebrew was the best and he always read prayers at such gatherings. He organized activities of this kind. He spent all his free time reading religious books alone. He always wore a yarmulka. Later my mother and I made him a satin bag with an embroidered Star of David on it for his tallit and a book [most probably his prayer book]. My father taught my mother how to read in Hebrew. She had a nice small prayer book that was very precious to her.

My parents had ten children. Their first two children died in infancy. The next child, Eshya, was born in 1903. He finished trade school in Rezina. He left his parents' home as soon as he could get a job. He painted bridges. Later he worked at the Popov factory in Odessa. He rented an apartment from a Jewish family there and fell in love with his landlord's daughter. They got married. He was very enthusiastic about the revolution of 1917. He was a fanatic communist. Before the war my brother and his family moved to Kiev. He was at the front during the war. After the war he returned to Kiev and worked as a foreman at a plant. Eshya died in Kiev in 1990. He had three children: Lena, Vilia and Svetlana. Vilia and Svetlana are in the US, and Lena lives in Belarus. We aren't in touch with her.

Esther, born in 1905, was a great help to her parents. When she was 15 she did the laundry for the whole family. My mother tailored fabrics, and Esther made clothes and did the laundry. It was mandatory to have some new clothes for Pesach, and they tried to have something made for every

member of the family: pants, shirts and even underwear for my father. My father's colleague, an accountant, fell in love with Esther. He was moving to Palestine and promised Esther to take her with him. He had to pay 40,000 lei to get a permit for Esther. It took him some time to save this amount of money. Esther was getting ready to go. I made a couple of dresses for her, and my mother made pillows and blankets. When Esther was finally ready to go she received notification from the authorities that the quota had been closed and she couldn't leave. She got married after she turned 40. In 1945, Mark Stein, her husband to be, came to Chernovtsy. He was 47 and had a daughter. His wife had perished in a ghetto in 1942. He didn't want more children, and Esther always regretted that she didn't have children of her own. She worked as a dressmaker. Mark died in 1982, Esther in 1992 in Chernovtsy.

Lisa, born in 1906, was a very talented artist and designer. She went to Kishinev, where she believed to have more opportunities to develop her skills and pursue a career. She rented a room with a big mirror, which she needed for her work, so that her clients could view themselves in a mirror when they tried on their new clothes. She was very talented and people advised her to move to Bucharest. She lived in a many-storied building in Bucharest. At the beginning of 1941 a bomb hit this building and she was buried under its ruins. I don't know where Lisa was buried. She was single.

Chaim, born in 1915, was lame. He fell from a tree when he was a child and didn't tell his parents. About a year passed before our mother noticed that Chaim was lame. Chaim was helping my father with his work. In 1939, when the Soviet army came to Western Ukraine and Bessarabia [1](#), Chaim stayed with me in Chernovtsy. He knew that he would get shelter. My mother cooked soup and mamalyga [corn pudding] to feed the family, but she couldn't quite manage and sent my brother to stay with me. These were trying times. Chaim met a Jewish girl, Fira, and they got married. During the first days of the war they headed to the East. They covered 350 kilometers. It was difficult for Chaim to walk, and he stayed behind. He was exhausted and weak, but then somebody helped him to get to Samarkand [Middle Asia, 3,000 km from Chernovtsy] where he had to go to hospital. In 1944, when Chernovtsy was liberated, we received a letter from him. We replied, and he wrote again and said when he heard from us it was the happiest day in his life in four and a half years. I was making necessary arrangements to obtain a permit [2](#) for my brother to come to Chernovtsy, but he died of tuberculosis in Samarkand in 1945.

My youngest brother, Nakhman, born in 1923, vanished at the very beginning of the war. He left town during the first days of the war. Somebody saw him in the field picking sugar beets. I don't know what happened to him. My brother, Avrumele, born in 1920, died of pleurisy when he was 8. Another baby suffocated while sleeping beside my mother. When she got up in the morning it was dead.

I'm the only survivor of the family. I was born in Rezina, a town on the right bank of the Dnestr, in 1912. When I was born this town was in Orkheisk district, on the border with the Russian Empire. After the Civil War [1918-1921] this area became a part of Romania, and in 1940 it became part of the Soviet Union. There was a Russian, Ukrainian and Moldavian and Jewish population in town. People of various nationalities got along well, and there was no anti-Semitism.

My family was deeply religious. My father prayed every morning. He prayed facing the wall and always had a band wrapped around his hand. Once I ran into the house shouting, 'Father, do you

know...?', and he just murmured, 'Nu'. [Yiddish for 'no talking'. During prayers that is the only word allowed to be said]. We, children, were supposed to wait until he was done with his praying to ask our questions. My father had a seat of his own in the synagogue in our village. He paid for it, and nobody else had a right to sit there. We only spoke Yiddish in the family. Nobody was allowed to do any work on Saturdays; all the food was cooked on Fridays. We did all washing and cleaning on Fridays, because we were supposed to relax and rest on Saturdays. We could take a rest in the house or yard. Everyone rested on Saturdays.

At Sukkot my father used to make a sukkah. We had our meals in this sukkah during the 8 days of Sukkot. At Shavuot my mother baked cottage cheese and cooked green soup. There was no meat on our menu on this day, I don't know why, but such was the rule.

Pesach was a big holiday: We went to synagogue on the first and the last day. We got together for dinner, my father conducted the seder, and my mother said a prayer. My parents always saved money to be able to afford more lavish food for Pesach. We always had matzah, and my mother made puddings and sponge cakes from it. I don't remember Chanukkah, but I believe we celebrated all holidays.

My mother had a beautiful voice. She used to sing and hum very beautiful Jewish and Ukrainian songs, when she did work at home. My mother learned Ukrainian songs from local farmers in Slobodzeya. She spoke fluent Ukrainian and even used Ukrainian sayings like 'Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you'. There was no anti-Semitism among people. I don't even think that this term existed at the time. My father sometimes said 'di sonim' [enemies in Yiddish] when he referred to indecent people, but he never used the word anti-Semites.

My mother could do everything about the house. She was a great housewife. She baked bread for the family twice a week. We could always have a slice of bread sprinkled with garlic or oil and salt as a snack. My father sometimes used to stay longer on his trips to the woods, and we had no money at such times. We went hungry or borrowed some money from our neighbors. My father was a very decent and honest man. He dealt with money, but he never cheated on his managers.

Once my brother Chaim fell ill and had to stay in hospital in Yassi. This hospital was sponsored by the master of the forestry. My father borrowed some money to buy medication for his son. When, at the end of the month, the administrator came to pick up the money for wood sales my father explained the situation to him saying that he would pay back. The administrator crossed out his debt and said, 'You don't owe me anything, because I can see how decent you are'. There was another man whose position was similar to my father's, but he wasn't so decent. My mother used to complain to my father, 'Look at Zlotnik, how well he provides for his wife and children while your children never have enough food and clothes'. My father replied, 'Don't look at others, Feige. I live according to our law'. He was an exemplary father and employee.

When I turned 6 my Jewish friend Esther, our neighbors' daughter, was admitted to the Jewish elementary school. I decided that I wanted to go there, too. Although I would have needed to wait another year I went there, said that I was 7 and was admitted. Education in this school was free of charge. It was a 'talmud torah study' school. I was interviewed by teachers of this school, and they told me that I had to go to grammar school with my knowledge of things. I explained to them that my father couldn't afford to buy me a uniform, textbooks or anything else. We studied in Yiddish. We studied the Torah, Jewish traditions and prayers. I also learned to read and write in Yiddish. I

completed my studies with 'priz madrege harishoyne [Award of Grade I].

The only teacher that I remember was a man called Maidanik. He was a great teacher and a nice man. One day at school he called me to the blackboard, and I left wet traces on the floor. He looked at me and told me to ask my mother to come to see him. What could she tell him: that she didn't have money to buy me shoes? But I got new boots. I don't know what he said to my mother or who bought these new boots. We had relatives who were better off in Rybnitsa, on the other side of the Dnestr River. They gave us their children's clothes that my mother altered for us.

Boys and girls studied together. According to Jewish law, boys and girls can study together until the age of 12. I finished this school when I was 10. A two-year trade school opened in our neighborhood. We studied Yiddish and Romanian, arithmetic, embroidery, crocheting and sewing there. I enjoyed going to school. I learned to write in Romanian and read, speak and write in Yiddish. The school enabled me to get the basics of education and of my future profession. My mother gave me pieces of white cloth, and I made pillowcases and napkins to decorate our home. I embroidered pillowcases for our dentist in Rezina, and he paid me 100 lei, which was a lot of money. I gave it to my mother. We could buy bread, butter, herring and even clothing for this money. My mother and I went to the market and bought cucumbers, tomatoes, plums and so on - a basket full of vegetables and fruit!

Many Jews in our region were farmers and grew corn, wheat, soybeans and tobacco. We lived near a half-finished construction of a sauna. Some people, Jews, rented this facility to use it for the drying and cutting of tobacco leaves. These people gave tobacco leaves to my mother at night, she completed the whole work process during the day, and the following night they came for the ready product. With this work she earned extra money for our budget.

I spent my childhood in Rezina and have very pleasant memories about this town. I remember the wedding of Feiga Milshtein, our neighbor's daughter. They rented a hall. There was music and klezmer musicians played. There was a horn, violin, flute, drums and something else - I can't remember. There was a table and two chairs for the bride and bridegroom and flowers all over the place. The bride was wearing a fancy white gown and the bridegroom was dressed up, too. Tables and benches were covered with white cloths. Women were cooking and baking. There was a velvet chuppah with a golden Star of David installed on four posts near the synagogue. There was a religious ceremony. The rabbi said a prayer, then people walked around the chuppah and the bride and bridegroom had wine. The bridegroom lifted his bride's veil and she took a sip. Then he took a sip and dropped the glass to break it. After that the bride and bridegroom kissed one another and their parents approached them to say their praises. The bride and bridegroom said their vows, and the bride put the sheet with vows into her corset. Then the wedding party began with eating, dancing and singing. Non-Jewish neighbors watched the wedding, and their eyes expressed nothing but kind feelings.

My father noticed that I was very good at sewing and told me to go to high school in Kishinev. In 1925 I went to study at trade school in Kishinev. I was 13. Our Ukrainian neighbor gave me a bag full of nuts, apples, grapes and a few lei before my departure. It was a school for Jewish girls from poor families. We also studied Romanian in this school. We had a very nice Jewish teacher, Sima Abramovna, a teacher of history, and Kavarskiy, an artist who taught us to draw: I remember plaster figures that we painted on the wall. We were taught to sew, cut fabrics and put clothes

together to fit a figure. We also made designs. This school was like a college. All our teachers were Jewish, except for our Romanian teacher and the teachers of geography and chemistry. The teaching was in Romanian. I studied there for two years and received a work certificate upon finishing this school.

I rented a room with three other girls that had come from smaller towns. Our landlords were Jews and were also poor. They were selling water with gas and syrup to make a living. They didn't observe any Jewish traditions and didn't celebrate any holidays. I never heard our landlord say that he was going to the synagogue. They worked on Saturdays. We didn't learn about traditions at school. I didn't have an opportunity to lead my life in the way I had at home, but when I came home on vacations we all did what my father told us to do.

In 1928, when I was 16, I went to the owner of a garment shop looking for a job. She interviewed me and I got employed. She was from Bucharest. I worked in this shop for about 8 months when my friends came from Chernovtsy and convinced me to leave Kishinev for Chernovtsy.

I rented an apartment from a very nice Jewish family from Bessarabia: Mendele Rakhman and his wife, two children and two sisters. They had a big apartment. They liked me and didn't charge much. I found a job at the Queen Blouse, the most popular shop in Chernovtsy. The owner spoke German. She was Jewish and came from Chernovtsy, but she found it more aristocratic to speak German. There were signs in German in all stores like the names of goods, information about working hours or warnings - just the usual stuff that can be seen in ordinary stores. Children were taught German. They had a better command of German than Yiddish.

I had a testing period at the shop. A very good hat specialist couldn't find a hat that she had made. And who was the suspect? Me, the newcomer, of course! But I hadn't seen the hat. In the long run it was found. I pretended that nothing had happened. I followed the rules that my father taught me - don't steal, lie or envy anything in life - and these rules proved to be helpful. The shop owner put me through another test. She called me to her home on a weekend and told me to make a pearl necklace. She probably counted the number of pearls and wanted to make sure of my honesty. These people considered all those that came from Bessarabia Russians, although we were as much Jewish as they were. They had a higher standard of living and level of education and were better off, but we were very honest and decent. I passed my tests successfully and deserved their good opinion. I was off work on Sundays. I worked on Saturdays regardless of the Jewish tradition to take a rest on this day. Even on Sundays, when the owner of the shop had customers from smaller towns that came to buy clothes, she asked me to work and paid me extra for my work. I spoke Yiddish to customers, but I picked up German soon.

The majority of the population in Chernovtsy was Jewish. There were also Poles, Romanians and Ukrainians. Ukrainians lived in the surrounding villages and were the poorest and least educated people. I had very nice Jewish friends, but there were few Ukrainians among my friends. There was no national segregation, and we didn't pay much attention to the issue of nationality. Every Sunday my friends and I went to the countryside: the woods or the river. We attended lectures and concerts and went to the theater. I spent every kopeck I had on buying a ticket for the theater. I didn't even leave my coat in the cloakroom. I left my coat at my acquaintance's home across the street from the theater instead to save some money that way. There were Jewish theaters in town and Jewish groups that came on tours.



I improved my professional skills and was thinking about my own business. In 1938 I passed exams to the state commission and obtained a license to run my own business. I took a loan at the bank to buy a sewing machine. I had high hopes of the future and was planning to work in partnership with my sister. But in 1940 the Soviet army came to town and my hopes vanished. We were enthusiastic about the Soviet power. We expected some positive changes in life. Many people got disappointed within a short time and moved to Israel, Romania, Canada and the US. I stayed.

When I was 28 or 29 I began to learn Russian. I used to buy Russian newspapers to master the language and began to speak Russian with my clients. My sister knew the language and helped me in the beginning. I have a very good conduct of Russian and nobody could tell now that I learned it from scratch.

There was a kosher Jewish canteen in Chernovtsy. My sister and I had meals there. They cooked delicious food. It was a popular place. They made gefilte fish, jellied fish and malay pudding [made from corn flour and eggs with sour milk and served with sour cream]. Corn flour was very popular in Bukovina. Later the Friedman family, the owners of the canteen, were deported to Siberia. They were wealthy and the authorities declared them bourgeois. Their canteen was closed.

I met my future husband, Srul Nisman, in this canteen. He was born in 1903 in Floresti, Soroka district, Moldavia. He was a handsome, stately and well-mannered man. He was seven years older than I, and I probably wasn't his match. He finished grammar school and started his business. He owned a plank storage facility. He supported his brother, who was studying at Medical College in Paris, his parents and his aunt and uncle. He came to Chernovtsy when he needed to pay visits to the bank. We fell in love, and I believed it was the love of my life.

In 1940 my sister Esther and my mother came to visit me and stayed in Chernovtsy. My younger brother, Nakhman, also came to Chernovtsy in 1940 to get professional education to become a mechanic. My father and my brother Chaim stayed at the forestry. My father was very concerned about the Romanians that all of a sudden became very aggressive. My father and Chaim moved to Chernovtsy, too, so that's how my family reunited.

Srul moved to Chernovtsy in 1940. It was the Soviet period and he realized that he had to forget his former business. He began to look for work. We went to the theater together, and he confessed that he saw more concerts and theater performances after we met than he had in his whole life before. We got married in February 1941. We had a civil ceremony. I hadn't even met my husband's parents. I remember that we had a small dinner at home after the ceremony, and that was all. The situation was troublesome. We weren't interested in politics and didn't know what was going on, but we understood that there were things to be concerned about.

Once we decided to go to the forest on a Saturday evening. We heard warplanes roaring above. We panicked and rushed back home. I can't remember the exact date. I believe, it was around the 20th or 21st of June 1941 [4](#). I was pregnant and suffered from cystitis and toxicosis. My husband and I decided to plan our escape from the Germans. I asked my parents if they would come with us. They replied that they would stay. Esther didn't want to leave them. There were Jewish refugees from Poland and Romania that told us about the horrible German attitude towards Jews. My husband and I packed our suitcases and went to the railway station. It was overcrowded, and there was no way to get on a train. These were the last trains. We stayed and lived through pain and fear.

The Germans arrived in town on 5th July 1941. From 5th to 8th July they danced and enjoyed themselves. They did anything they wanted. People said that they had been given a few days off to celebrate the victory. At 11 o'clock on 8th July my husband and I were sitting at the table when we heard the Germans ordering men to come outside. They opened the door to our room and stood in the doorway. My husband hugged me tightly. I ran after him out into the yard. He called me and gave me our marriage certificate, his ring and pen. He knew that he wouldn't come back from where he was being taken.

We believed that the Germans were cultured people, but I understood then that this was a very wrong assumption. I was told that 100 men were following the rabbi of Chernovtsy along the streets, past the main synagogue, in the direction of the railway station. There was a field across the street from the station, and the Germans ordered 20 men to dig a pit. They threatened to shoot them if they said a word. They buried them alive. My husband was among them. Much later a stone was erected on this spot. [Several mass executions of this kind happened in July 1941. 900 people died. On 9th May 2001 a monument was erected at the spot: a white post with a Star of David on it].

Announcements were put on buildings, ordering Jews to move to streets that were specifically marked for their residence. We started moving our belongings. A German soldier told us to leave everything behind. He said that we were only going to stay in the ghetto temporarily. A few streets were enclosed with wooden fencing. The street with the sauna was also enclosed in this ghetto. All dwellings were overcrowded. We lived in a laundry room and slept on the floor. I felt very ill. We didn't have enough food and exchanged everything we had managed to take with us for food.

After a few months somebody told us there were announcements on the walls. We read that the Germans were selecting craftsmen if one had any document to prove his professional capability. I had my diploma and went to the registry office. They put down the number of my diploma and the authority that had issued it. I was allowed to live in Chernovtsy and could take my family with me. I saved their lives. All other inmates of the ghetto, intellectuals, lawyers, financiers and others were sent to other ghettos in the Vinnitsa region, and the majority of them perished.

Before the war I began to make dresses for a Romanian client. Her last name was Bakulinskaya. Her husband worked at the city council. This client and her husband were looking for me in the ghetto. I don't know whether she felt sorry for me or if she just wanted to have her dresses, but they found me and brought me a loaf of bread. She asked whether I could finish the dresses and suggested that I work at her place. She had a sewing machine and gave me food.

The inmates of the ghetto were allowed to leave the ghetto wearing a [yellow] Star of David on the left side. My father made a star from carton, I sewed it into a piece of cloth, we attached it to our clothing with safety pins and went out. We were supposed to be back in the ghetto before 6 p.m. We strictly observed all rules and survived. I went to this client of mine to work. She was kind to me. She told her friend about me and that friend wanted a gown, too. Then she recommended me to somebody else, and this was how I started to earn my living.

My mother went to the market in town to buy food, because the prices were lower than in the ghetto. She also had a star on her clothes. All of a sudden she saw Romanians beating my father. She ran to them yelling in Romanian, 'How can you beat an older person? Shame on you! Do you not have a father and a mother?'. They let him go. We told my father to stay at home. He had a



typical Semitic appearance, and also a beard.

On 25th December 1941 my daughter Maria was born. We lived in the ghetto in Chernovtsy, in the house where we were taken on the first days of the occupation. I didn't want to go to hospital. We were allowed to leave the ghetto during the day to go to hospital, but we were afraid that the Germans would break into the hospital and kill me. My sister and my father had to go ask a doctor to come at night. A Romanian soldier agreed to accompany them for money. The baby weighed 3 kilos, 250 grams at birth. My father, mother and sister helped me to look after my new-born child. I stayed at home for half a year, but I did some sewing on the side. The baby was growing rapidly. She used to say, 'Grandma, nokh!'. She knew that 'nokh' meant 'more' in Yiddish. She began to walk when she was 1 year old.

My father observed all Jewish traditions, even in the ghetto. He went to the synagogue in the ghetto on Saturdays. He prayed at home twice a day. My mother lit candles at home on Fridays. We didn't always manage to get matzah on holidays [for Pesach], but my father used to say that it was all right to make mamalyga or malay [food made from corn flour] instead. Life in the ghetto was hard. We were aware that every day might be the last day of our lives. Some of our neighbors vanished every night. It became particularly frightening in 1944 when it was clear that the enemy was retreating. We didn't turn on the lights at night. We looked forward to the arrival of the Soviet army. My mother was hoping to see her sons. They were at the front, but we hadn't heard from them.

Chernovtsy was liberated in 1944. My older brother, Eshya, had to come to Chernovtsy on a business trip. He was looking for us there, but couldn't find us until he met an acquaintance that took him to us. My brother stayed outside while this acquaintance of ours came in to prepare my mother to see her son. But whatever the preparations, my mother fainted on seeing Eshya. My brother went to a store to get us some food and bought my mother a pair of shoes and a piece of fabric for a coat.

In the fall of 1944 we returned to the apartment that had belonged to us before the war. It wasn't a very comfortable apartment, but it was ours. I worked in a shop and at home in the evenings to provide for the family. My mother did all the housework. My daughter went to kindergarten and learned to speak Russian. We spoke Yiddish at home and German or Romanian to our clients, and she didn't know a word in Russian before 1944.

After the war my mother aged quickly. Her children's death was very hard for her to bear. She couldn't sleep at night and didn't eat anything. The doctors said she had cancer. She went to hospital, but nothing could be done to help her. We didn't want her to die in hospital and took her home. She lived for another month and died in 1948.

In 1948 I went to work in the garment factory where my friend Katz, a communist, was director. Something that changed my life happened in the same year. I met a man that I had known for a long time. His name was Zis Gutnik, and he was born in 1910. He came from a Jewish family with many daughters, and as the only boy he was the favorite in the family, much loved and spoiled. When I was 18 my friend and I were on the train from Bucharest where we went to buy designs for clothes. On this train we began to sing Jewish and Romanian songs. I had a beautiful soprano. Some people came closer. Zis said later that he recalled a pretty tiny girl. Zis was in service in the Romanian army and was going to Sekuryany on leave. We liked each other, but we were no match.

I came from a poor family, and he had a very different background. His parents had their own vision of his future. He married the daughter of the owner of a brewery. They had a beautiful son.

In 1941 Zis was arrested and sent to a Stalinist [5](#) camp. He was innocent, but so were so many other people whose only fault was that they came from wealthier families. He was charged of disobedience to the Soviet authorities, espionage, and sentenced to eight years of imprisonment. He was in prison in Sverdlovsk. He submitted requests to be sent to the front, but the authorities refused him. They were reluctant to recruit people from areas that had just joined the Soviet Union. But because of his exemplary behavior and his continuous submittal of requests to be sent to the front, he was released one and a half years before the end of his term. He returned in 1947.

My husband's family perished in Sekuryany: his father, mother, wife and son, his sister and her husband and child. His other sister, who was in evacuation, survived and returned to Chernovtsy. He stayed with her. We met by chance and first didn't recognize each other. I actually rescued him. I saw a man in the street that didn't see a truck driving in his direction. I pulled him to the roadside. We talked a little. I came home and told my mother about this meeting. He visited me a few times. We rarely saw each other. My mother was ill and needed my care. My daughter had measles and this resulted in pneumonia and I looked after her.

Zis also had problems. Nobody was supposed to know that he had been imprisoned, or life would be hard for him, because people would be suspicious. It was later, in 1958, that we obtained a certificate of complete rehabilitation, but after the war it was better to go to a place where nobody knew him. He went to Lvov. He got a job there and rented a room. In 1950 he came to Chernovtsy and proposed to me. I had my doubts and was worried about my daughter. She was a nervous and sickly girl. She was taciturn and reserved. Zis was kind to my daughter, and I gradually explained to her that he was to become her father.

My father, my daughter and I packed and moved to Lvov. Zis and I got married there. We only had a civil ceremony. I kept my first husband's last name, Nisman, to keep the memory of him. My daughter finished the 1st grade at primary school in Chernovtsy with honors. She also finished the 2nd grade in Lvov with honors. She was a smart girl. She had Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish friends.

We didn't face any anti-Semitism, but it was beginning to show at the end of the 1940s. It seemed that people contracted it like a disease from the Germans. Germans left anti-Semitism with non-Jewish people, because with Jews they only left pain and blood. I wasn't political, but I had a feeling that the situation was getting worse. Not for me personally, but in general. I worked in the factory. There were Ukrainian and Romanian employees and there weren't so many of us. We got along well and provided good services to our customers, so everything was fine in this respect.

In Lvov the first question that my father asked was, 'Where's the synagogue here?'. It wasn't too far from our house, and he went there immediately. Within half a year he was elected to be gabbai in shil [communal official]. People addressed him to resolve their disputes, problems and requests. I can't say that my husband and I were religious. My parents were religious. As for me, I observe traditions as a tribute to the past. We always celebrated Jewish holidays in our family: Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Chanukkah. On Fridays we lit candles, and my father was very happy.

My father was a very intelligent man, although the only education he had was what he learned in cheder. He could speak and write in Yiddish, Romanian and Russian. He prayed at home twice a

day. He died in 1959. When we asked the doctor why he died he replied, 'His time was over'. My father was 86 when he died.

My second daughter was born in Lvov in 1951. I wanted to name her Faina so that the first letter of her name would be F, after my mother Feige. But she became Inna. She's a very nice and kind girl. She is much loved by everyone. Her father just adored her. My husband was responsible for fixing looms and he was also a weaver. He had a good salary. I worked in a fashion shop. Inna was a very sickly girl. She had asthma, and I decided to quit my job. I had my private clients that gave me orders. I worked at home and earned more than I did at work. I receive a small pension now because the amount of the pension depends on how many years one worked.

After the war stores were empty. My clients were wealthy people and had access to a greater variety of products. They brought me various goods: herring, socks and so on. I had good business relationships with my clientele.

My older daughter, Maria, finished secondary school and graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute. She graduated as a glass chemist in 1964. It was difficult for a Jew to find a job at that time. My daughter wrote 20 application letters to directors of glass factories. She received a response from a factory in Belokrynitsa, Zhytomir region. Work conditions were very hard there. She was a pretty, young girl. As she had a university degree she was appointed chief of shift. The workers were mostly drunk, and she had to wake them up and force them to work. She rented a room from a local woman. She is a hardworking girl. Later she worked in Irpen near Kiev and rented a room from a janitor in Kiev. She met a Jewish man called Krupievskiy. They dated for quite a while before they got married. Their son Sasha was born in 1974. He lives in Israel now. He got married recently. Maria and her husband live in Kiev.

Inna is not as smart as her sister. She is a charming and spoiled girl. My husband was always on her side and didn't allow me to tell her off. Whenever I was about to make a reprimand he told me, 'Leave her alone'. At the time our girls were growing up, young people showed no interest in Jewish traditions. When my husband and I spoke Yiddish our daughters laughed, saying 'Don't speak Yiddish, please. We can't understand it'. There were a few Jewish boys and girls in Inna's class, but they never showed any outward signs of their Jewish identity. They didn't even know their mother tongue.

Inna graduated from the Lvov Forestry Engineering Institute. She worked as an accountant. Her husband, whose last name is Zubkov, isn't Jewish, but we had no objections to her marriage. They have a daughter called Evelina. In 1990 Inna and her family moved to Israel. The climate there is very good for her. She has fewer breathing problems. She has a job and is a very good employee. She works at a bank. She's doing very well and supports me. Inna comes to Kiev every year. She often calls me and tells me that she misses me.

My husband and I lived together for 46 years. We had a good life. He identified himself as a Jew, but he wasn't religious. He didn't go to synagogue. When the Jewish community organized Pesach celebrations in the 1990s my husband and I went there. He enjoyed it very much. He came from a very religious family. I celebrate the Jewish holidays that I remember. We always celebrated Pesach at home. We bought matzah. I also try to cook something traditional on Jewish holidays. My husband fasted on Yom Kippur, but I didn't because I have a poor heart. My husband died of infarction in 1996.

In 2000 I visited my daughter in Israel. This country is like a garden. It's very green; there are many flowers everywhere and very old palm trees. I visited my friends, and they were all very happy to see me and very hospitable. I felt very much at home. People speak Hebrew all around. I can't speak it well, but I can understand it. I didn't want to stay in Israel though. Firstly, I believe children must live their own life. They are very different from my generation, and one cannot live with one's children! They have a different mentality and a different way of life. My home is here. I've lived in this house for over half a century. I survived the war and that's the worst thing in life that happened to me. I knew good and hard times in this house. I shall spend the rest of my life here.

I am glad that there's Hesed, the Jewish charity fund. Hesed supports older people. I borrowed World History of the Jewish People by Dubnow [6](#) from the Hesed library. I may not read all of it, but it's a very interesting book. I learned many new things about our people. They've been suppressed and attacked throughout centuries, but they survived.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of the Odessa region. Today it is part of Moldavia.

### **[2](#) Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

### **[3](#) Great Patriotic War**

On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.

### **[5](#) Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

## **6 Dubnow, Simon (1860-1941)**

One of the great modern Jewish historians and thinkers. Born in Belarus, he was close to the circle of the Jewish enlightenment in Russia. His greatest achievement was his study of the history of the Jews in Eastern Europe and their spiritual and religious movements. His major work was the ten volume World History of the Jewish People. Dubnow settled in Berlin in 1922. When Hitler came to power he moved to Riga, where he was put into the ghetto in 1941 and shot by a Gestapo officer on 8 December the same year.