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Family background

I was born in Leningrad in 1939. My great-grandfather was from *Rogachev.* His family name was Volokh. Some people say he lived to 106, others, to 116. My great-grandfather had three wives. Our family originates from his third marriage. He spoke Yiddish and was very religious. He was very willful and, in a way, harsh and authoritative. But he did all he could to give his children some education – not higher or intellectual education, but a vocational one.

For example, my grandfather Abram was a tailor, a very skillful tailor. He was born in Rogachev and later moved to *Gomel*. The name “Volokh” is very rare and means “alien.” You understand why “alien” – we are all aliens.

Grandfather Abram had a big family: five sons and two daughters. Grandmother was a housewife – she took care of her family. They knew and observed Jewish holidays. They mainly spoke Yiddish, but Russian and Byelorussian, as well. Grandfather used to wear European dress; he wore a tie and a neat suit. His manner of speech and behavior were very similar to those of *Gorky*. He was a short, thin, nimble man with a good sense of humor. He wore a small beard and a trimmed moustache.

Grandmother was a stout, even massive, woman, 1½ times as tall as Grandfather. She wore European clothes and smoothly combed hair. Her name was Stysha. The children had Jewish names: the elder son, my father, was Chaim, then David, Nahum, Samuel and Boris. Their daughters were Fanya and Sara. They all got their primary education in a Jewish school – in *cheder*. Grandmother was the head of the family. Self-sufficient and high-handed, she could manage both her husband and the whole horde of children and grandchildren. Everybody obeyed her.

On holidays they liked to drink and make the toast, “*L’chaim*,” but within limits. My grandparents and my father had a good ear for music and good voices. They often sang in Yiddish. Grandfather knew Hebrew; my father wrote him letters in this language.

They lived in an ordinary wooden two-story house, which was surrounded by a garden. There were good yields of apples. But children are always children. They liked to explore neighbors' gardens as well, for which they were often punished. They used to play tricks at school, too. Once their teacher's beard was glued to his table when he fell asleep.

My parents come from Belorussia. However, my mother, Roza Leikova, was born in *Dnipropetrovsk,* Ukraine. I do not know exactly why my grandfather took my grandmother there for a period of time. Unfortunately, I do not know anything about my mother's parents except that her father, Moshe Leikov, owned a small ice cream and lemonade factory. Weather conditions were extremely unfavorable one year, and he went bankrupt and died soon. The family moved to Rogachev. Ida Leikova was my grandmother on my mother's side. I only know her name; I have no information about where she was born, how she earned a living or her relatives.

My mother completed four years in a Russian school. And Father, who was born in Rogachev, completed six years of a Jewish school there. He could speak and write Hebrew, spoke Yiddish and Russian, but with a Jewish accent. Both were Komsomol members. Back then, drama circles were very popular. Father was in a Jewish drama society. Mother had a wonderful voice. She came to the same circle. They met there, most probably in 1928. He used to sing and she danced. Both were young and handsome, with beautiful voices. Mother had fallen in love, desperately. Father being so handsome, she had lots of competitors.

In 1930 my father joined the Party. As a member, he was sent to Leningrad to study in a workers' faculty, where he could work and study simultaneously. Mother rushed after him to Leningrad. Her name was Sheine-Reize, according to her birth certificate, but she changed it to Roza Mikhailovna for her passport. She had to change her Jewish name to enter a musical college. She was a very good performer on a mandolin, played some violin, and they advised her to go to Leningrad with an authorization from the Komsomol. But on the way, there was a tragedy – she was robbed. The worst thing was that her Komsomol card had been stolen. Then, to lose your Komsomol card could lead even to a death penalty. So, she had to live incognito in Leningrad. Nothing was said about entering any musical school. That is why she went to Father, who stayed in a hostel as a student of the workers' faculty. For one year, they had lived as husband and wife.

Growing up

In 1932 their marriage was registered in a state office. Although my father was a communist, they did not forget Jewish traditions. Secretly they observed every Jewish holiday: *Pesach, Purim* and others. Mother was a good cook: she baked *matzah*, and cooked *kneidlach*, stuffed fish, goose, etc. Father concealed his knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish. He had a good position at that time – he was chairman of an industrial association, which would be equal to the director of a footwear factory now. He was also the secretary of a Party organization. That is why we lived well before the war.

We lived in a shared apartment, where one room was ours. The building was in Smolninsky district, 10 minutes' walk from Smolny. As a Party activist with many awards, my father was expecting a separate flat in a new building behind Smolny Cathedral, on Smolninskaya Embankment. He took part in the construction of that building.

Our apartment was in a former inn, built before the Revolution. There were four rooms in the flat. Our family occupied one of them. It was 20 square meters. Mother and Father first lived by themselves, then in 1933 my sister was born, me in 1939, and my brother in 1946. So, there were five of us living in that room. The next two rooms were occupied by the family of a Jewish woman, Antseva. She did all she could to take revenge on us for taking the room vacated after the previous dweller died – she had her own pretensions. Another room was occupied by a Jewish lady, Katsnelson, who sort of adhered to neutral policies. The common kitchen was big – about 15 square meters. An oven, stuffed with firewood, took up one-third of it. In the 1950s, they disassembled it and installed a gas stove. There was a bathroom with firewood heater. But we didn't use it, because there was another stove in the room. We didn't have enough firewood for all of them. We used to go to the famous Mytninskiye bath house.

In 1953, they installed steam heating and began to supply hot water and we could use our own bathroom. The corridor was long and narrow. One toilet for four families. In the morning we all had to queue up. There was a telephone, but in the Antsevs' room. Antsev was a lawyer, and his wife didn't permit the telephone to be in the corridor and wouldn't let the rest of us use it.

We had some books, but not many. At that time, acquiring books was a problem. Of Jewish books, I remember that we had a pre-Revolution edition of "History of Jewish Settlement in Russia." We had the traditional collection of that time: Gorky, Pushkin, Lermontov – but not a big one. Mother and Father were keen on reading. Between themselves they mainly spoke Russian. But when they didn't want us to understand, they would shift to Yiddish. My elder sister somehow understood Yiddish naturally, from birth. I was too small and not that gifted. I couldn't comprehend what they were talking about.

There were no holidays as such before the war. You could go on holiday as a bonus for hard work. Father used those to go to Gomel to visit his parents, whom he helped a lot, and his brothers and sisters, whom he also helped. Financially, he was the most well-to-do of them all. He used to take us for trips to Peterhoff, Pushkin, Pavlovsk. We went to Strelna, on the coast of the Finnish Gulf. Back then, picnics were very popular, and whole collectives of enterprises went together. We suffered no privations, because Father, as a managing Party member, was given an extra of 300 rubles for food. We went to restaurants and ate well.

Around 1939, 1940, we had a maid. But Mother could only stand her for half a year. Mother was a very orderly, scrupulous person and couldn't bear any untidiness. That's why she brought us up by herself.

Father served his term in the army with such military commanders as Tukhachevsky and Yakir. He was awarded honorary diplomas for military service. His photos were printed in the papers of that time. In 1941, he was drafted again for training in the courses of the Higher Commanding Staff.

During the war

Mother and two of us children were caught by the war in our summerhouse in *Strelna*, a resort just outside Leningrad. I was born in Strelna, where my parents spent one of the summers. In June 1941, when the Germans occupied *Ligovo* and were very close to Strelna, my mother, me and my elder sister went rushing along Peterhoff highway to Leningrad. There were a few traitors in our

column, also trying to reach the city. One of those spies attempted to join us. He offered Mother help with her sack containing our belongings. But she felt something wrong and refused his help. Later he had been caught and he turned out to be a spy. If – God forbid! – Mother would have handed him our sack, we would have been shot as the spy's accomplices. We ran to Leningrad and reached the center, where we lived, on foot.

From September 8, 1941, the blockade had been officially declared in Leningrad. We had no food supplies, so we began starving very soon. Mother received 125 grams of bread for each of us. In winter, when she had to go out, she put a pot of live coals at our feet to keep us warm. That's how we survived through that terrible winter of 1942. Mother spent half a day queuing for the so-called bread. In reality, it was mill cake with glue. She used to cut each 125-gram piece into 5 parts, giving us 25 grams at a time. I had an advantage before my sister – I used to lick off the tiny crumbs of bread from the small white paper after the bread was cut, then kiss Father's picture that stood on the table and ask: "Daddy, please, give me some more crumbs!" When Mother was leaving, she would hide the bread in a wall clock that my sister couldn't reach. She was 7. At night, she would wake up every time Mother attempted to get inside the clock and take her share of bread. My sister would follow her every move and Mother managed to cut a little out of her 125-gram piece for us.

When we were absolutely exhausted and Mother realized that we would not survive the blockade – we started to swell from hunger, and Mother withered so that she looked like she was 60, rather than 30 – she ran into the secretary of the Smolninsky district Party Committee. He knew our father very well. Mother told him that Father was at the front, near Stalingrad. The following day Mother went to the Committee, presented all the awards Father received before the war and asked that our family be evacuated. To give the secretary his due, he helped us to draw up papers.

Mother knew that it was not permitted to take children across Ladoga Lake, because the temperature fell to minus-40 degrees Celsius. People died and their frozen corpses arrived on the other side. She managed to exchange what she could save of her bread ration for spirit and vodka in a hospital. Spirit and vodka always have been hard currency in this country. She used them to entreat those who were in charge of evacuation. Thus, having left behind everything – except blankets and pillows in which Mother could wrap us – we climbed into a railway van and traveled to Ladoga in terrible conditions. Once there, we were plunged into an open truck. Mother had muffled us up into all those blankets, leaving but small holes for breathing. Our aunt, the wife of father's younger brother, her small son and a 16-year-old nephew accompanied us. The elder boy was sick and couldn't move, so they pulled him on a sled.

This is how we crossed Ladoga and then again we were plunged into cattle railway vans and taken to *Borisova Griva*. Because it was very cold and the vans were not heated, I caught chilblains on my hands and legs, and, forgive me, my buttocks, for everybody had upset stomachs and the children used to empty them right into the open doors. I suffer from those chilblains until now.

In Borisova Griva we stopped to eat and wash. The live skeletons washed themselves in one and the same banya. We had some soup. Many died; because they couldn't resist the temptation of gobbling their dinners. Immediately their bowels were twisted and they died. Mother divided our dinners into parts and gave us the soup in teaspoons, saving our lives in this way.

From Borisova Griva we planned to go to Stalingrad to join our father. But we received a coded letter from him saying that the climate there was too bad for children, which meant that the situation near Stalingrad had become critical with the Germans approaching the city. Mother grasped it all and we headed for the Altai region, Siberia, to the village of *Bystry Istok*.

We have moved out of Leningrad in late February 1942, and we arrived to Bystry Istok in May 1942. We were given a small room with a hall for two families there. Mother devoted herself to agriculture. She had planted potatoes on a 10-square meter spot of land. She had protected the potatoes with tomatoes, so we had tomatoes on top and potatoes underground. Our aunt was a bookkeeper at a local dairy factory. She brought buttermilk from work – the leftovers from butter-kneading. That saved us. I was so weak that all my body was swollen and had boils. The abscesses burst, exposing naked flesh. The situation was so bad that doctors said I wouldn't live for two weeks longer. On top of that, I caught malaria. I was lucky that a nurse from Leningrad advised Mother to have her blood transfused to me. However, they couldn't take more than one syringe of blood from my mother; the blood just didn't drip. But when I had that little blood transfused to my body, I started to get better. I am very thankful to Mother, that nurse and everyone who saved my life – I nearly died four times.

Before 1944 we lived with my aunt. One could return to Leningrad only upon an invitation from relatives. My aunt had a sister in Leningrad and received an invitation. We had to stay in Siberia, without any livelihood.

After Stalingrad, my father's regiment was sent to the Crimea, where a part of his battalion was defending the Dzhankoi bridge and the other part was sent to provide security for the participants of Yalta conference. The Dzhankoi railway bridge on *Sivash* Lake was exposed to airplane attacks and was strategically significant in the Crimea. It was guarded by the regiment 1177 of the antiaircraft troops, under my father's command. Father was highly respected by the soldiers. Once, in a conversation, he mentioned that his family was near *Barnaul*. It turned out that one of the soldiers was born near the place; it was his home. There were many convicts among those soldiers, they used to serve at the very front line.

The soldier was in prison for 10 years before the war, so he had not seen his relatives for 10 years. He said to Father: "If you trust me, you will let me go and see my family and I will bring yours here." Father, violating service regulations, had taken the risk – now I can tell it. He was the battalion's commander of staff. He gave the soldier two weeks, never telling anybody anything. Only the battalion commander was informed. On New Year's Eve the soldier left for Barnaul.

At the same time, a fortuneteller told mother that a military man would come and take her away. We believed every little thing then, and Mother was waiting for Father. December 21 is my sister's birthday. Mother prepared spirits for that day and kept waiting. Around that date, at night, there came a knock on the door. Mother saw a military man through a door slit. She didn't even notice that the man was about 2 meters tall, whereas Father was of medium height. She decided he was our father. She opened the door and saw a completely frozen man. It was Alexei, sent by Father.

He had walked more than 30 kilometers in minus-30 degrees. Those who had been to Siberia would know what kind of frosts there are there! He was running all the way from the station not to his own family, but to ours, to tell Mother to prepare for the journey, and that he would take us to

Father. He was absolutely frost-bitten and he was lucky that Mother had the spirits. She rubbed him, she fed him, she warmed him. Having spent two days at our place and partly recovered, he ran to see his family. He handed Mother a letter in which Father warned her to be cautious with Alexei, who had been a convict in the past, and although he fought well, she had better be on alert.

Mother was afraid that Alexei would never come back. He promised to return on the second day, but he came back only on the third. He helped Mother pack and hired a horse sled. I don't know how he managed to do it, or where he got the money. He helped us into the sled and ran aside all the way to Barnaul railway station in a blizzard.

Alexei was a cardsharper. He taught Mother to play cards and used her as a partner. Mother couldn't say refuse; she was afraid of him. And he said: "Keep quiet! I'll show you everything." When Mother tried to talk back, he asked: "What? Do you have the money to feed the children? And I promised comrade Volokh to bring his family safe and sound. Besides, I want you to look decent when we come." He beat the whole carriage. And when Mother attempted to rebel, he said that, had the other players earned their money in a fair way, they would never have played cards. "Just do what I'm telling you," he used to order, and Mother, too, defeated the other players.

In three weeks we arrived to Sivash. I remember that we arrived at night. A bearded man lifted me up. And Mother said he was my father. Later, Father used to say that fortune protected him, because he always had a curl of my hair with him, which he had cut from my head without my mother's knowledge. He carried it in his chest pocket. We lived in an earth-house. The earth-house had all the inconveniences: no stove, metal beds, mice, rats, bugs, what not! It was about 500 meters from the antiaircraft regiment. We loved in this den until late March 1945.

Because of dampness I had caught pneumonia and pleurisy there. To save my life, soldiers, standing knee-deep in cold water, collected salt in Sivash Lake. They sold it, and medicines were bought for me. After a month, Father was allowed to move us into an ordinary village house. I was taken to Simpheropol for an X-ray to check my lungs. It was there that I saw my first film in a cinema. It was "Charlie's Aunt" – I still remember clearly. I also was on a trolley there for the first time.

When I recovered, I started to bring my father's dinners to his detachment. I saw antiaircraft guns. By the middle of April 1945 father's battalion was moved to Zaporozhye, the so-called "Brezhnev area." It was there, on the bank of the Dniper, close to a metal plant being restored by captive Germans, that Father's battalion was quartered. Again we lived in an earth-house. At high water, the dwelling often flooded. There was Khortitsa Island close by, with fruit bases on it. Barges hauled out fruit. Sometimes barges turned over and people used to pull the fruit from the river. Soldiers used to sail to Khortitsa to buy fruit.

They took Mother sometimes, passing her off as a hospital nurse. Young guys were hungry for fruit, but had no money. So, they made big pockets inside their overcoats. They would approach the island in a stolen boat – former criminals, they were used to it – loaded their rucksacks with fruit, weighed them and, meanwhile, put some in their pockets. And their pockets could hold more then their rucksacks. When they learned how much the fruit in the rucksacks cost, they started to bargain with the sellers and deliberately did not come to an agreement, dumped the stuff, and left with heaps of fruit in their pockets. That's how they fed us – watermelons, apples, peaches, plums.

After the war

We celebrated Victory Day, May 9, 1945, in our dugout. But adventures were not over yet. On May 11, when the Germans started the offensive in the rear again, we received a coded telegram, and were very scared. It turned out that several captive German soldiers had fled from the construction site of the metal plant, not far from us. They committed a murder in a nearby village to get some clothing and documents. Guards used to stand watch around our earth-house whenever Father was on duty. Thank God, everything ended up well.

Later, Father was allowed to send us to *Zaporozhye*. A lieutenant Levchenko, who was born there, served in Father's battalion, and he took us with him. In the fall of 1945 Father was dismissed from military service and we left Zaporozhye. Father was offered a position in the army, but he was a civilian by nature. We moved to Leningrad via Moscow.

We returned to our old room in Smolninsky district. It was plundered, but unoccupied. The neighbor who wanted to get our room kept it for herself all through the blockade. She believed we were killed or died in evacuation. She took part in the robbery. We saw our dishes at her place. There was a rich collection of records and a gramophone – these we found in the yard-keeper's room. Some things were found in the communal services office. A few things remained intact: wine glasses and mother's embroidery patterns. The key broke when the thieves attempted to unlock the old pre-war buffet. The robbers might have been too weak to pull it out. That buffet survived along with an old wardrobe, a sofa and a few chairs. The rest was either burned or stolen. Other neighbors, the caretaker and the chief of communal services bureau, met us quite warmly. But not the lady who tried to get our room. Unfortunately, she, being a Jew, had showed the maximum possible hostility toward us.

I went to school in 1946. I'll remember the name of my first teacher, Anna Andreievna Schmidt, all my life. She was an ordinary woman, but she was very close to my mother. I was a very weak "blockade child." I was admitted to school on condition that if it was too hard for me, I'd be released from studies. I already was able to read and write, so I settled down and became a regular pupil. My favorite subjects were mathematics and physics. The tutors used to say I was "technically minded." We had a very good physics teacher, Vanichev, who liked me because I was not afraid to experiment with electricity. I can't say I was an excellent pupil. I was not, but I was a very gifted child. I just had no room for studying at home. There were three of us studying at the same table. My elder sister's memory was weak after bombings. Mother wouldn't let me get up from the table before I helped my brother with his mathematics. I was very pressed for time. Apart from school, I attended a geological circle in the Palace of Pioneers. I didn't need any private tutoring, because school studies were easy for me.

In 1950 our good acquaintance Rusetsky, a lawyer, came one night to warn us of danger. He took away all pre-war papers in which his father's name had been mentioned. His father was a friend of our family. A year later Rusetsky was arrested and *repressed*. During the search, our address was found in his papers, and Father was summoned for interrogation to the *Big House.* Father was dismissed from his job. Only a half-year later, friends helped him to get the position of a footwear shop superintendent out of town somewhere. During the period he was jobless, the family had no means. We were regularly visited by shoemakers who had worked under my father. They helped us

out financially. But it was not without their help that he took to wine. It was really a great misfortune for our family.

I had a Jewish friend, Slava Efraimovich, in school. Then I had no idea of nationalities – Russian or Jewish. I acquired the understanding after graduation. I was among the five best mathematicians in class. At the graduation ball, the mathematics teacher and then the physics teacher said I could contact them if I did not enter an institute. They could help arrange my further study. But I didn't see why I wouldn't enter. Everybody was always saying that I alone of the whole class certainly would be admitted to a higher institution. They didn't say anything about my naiveté.

Naturally, I was not admitted. I got an excellent mark at the first exam – written mathematics. But in oral mathematics I received "satisfactory," having heard the following words behind my back: "Pluck this one. We've got enough of them already." And then I understood what I was.

Because I wasn't admitted to the Institute of Water Transport, my teacher helped me enter the Radiotechnical College in 1956, the so-called "protection department," consisting of culture- and sports-minded students. That college sent me to the Sixth International Youth Festival in Moscow. I participated in gymnastics performances and I was the leader of our team. The costumes were very interesting; it is still considered a significant achievement. First, the girls would come out in blue tennis dresses and exercise with hoops. Suddenly, we would squat and boys would stand up. Then the boys would squat and we would rise, but in pink dresses! The stadium was stunned. We wore pink dresses were under the blue ones. When we squatted, we would unfasten snaps at our shoulders and the pink blouse and skirt would fall. The effect was extraordinary. I have an honorary diploma for that performance. We also went in for skiing, cycling, a little of everything.

I was a member of the Komsomol, because all the roads were blocked outside of it. They were blocked anyway, but more so without the Komsomol. At that time, one was scared to death at the very thought of showing his religious interests or going to a synagogue, so I had been to one for the first time when I was a student, on *Simchat Torah*. That was around 1962. I instigated for the whole group to flee from the lectures, so all of us – Russians, Tartars, Ukrainians – went to the merry holiday of *Simchat Torah*.

After graduation from college in 1957 I was qualified as a draftsman and designer. The college directed me to work in a scientific research institute of the military industry where I received a pass with a second grade of secrecy. I found myself in a secret department. You can understand what relation one can have to Judaism having access to secrecy matters. For example, my brother had a pen pal in Czechoslovakia. That correspondence was discontinued because of me, as we learned later. I was engaged in public work. I was the leader of the sector of culture in our Komsomol organization.

In the summer of 1958 I tried to enter two institutes at once: the North-West Polytechnical Institute, where I passed all examinations with good marks in July, and the Bonch-Bruevich Institute of Electrical Engineering. There I got excellent marks for all exams except Russian language. Some adventure was waiting for me there. I attended the preparatory course under my friend's name. She was too lazy to study, and I wouldn't be admitted because of my nationality. I did very well and they even wanted to admit me without examinations. But then I burst into tears and confessed that my family name was Volokh, rather than Gavrilkina. The professors said that had I confessed

earlier, I would have been admitted without examinations. But I passed my exams to the evening department of radio communication and broadcasting. I studied in the Bonch-Bruevich Institute for two years. All of a sudden, during one examination session, my eyes failed due to acute astigmatism and I had to move to the external studies department. I graduated from the Institute in 1965, when I had a 9-month-old baby. Of 200 students admitted to the external studies department, only I graduated. And within the scheduled time, too. I took a half-year leave only once – to take care of my newborn baby. My daughter was born on April 6, 1965, and I had to defend my diploma in June. So, after nine months I had defended my diploma.

Marriage life and children

I got married in 1963. I met my future husband in 1960 at a ball dedicated to the *8th of March holiday* in the Palace of Culture named after Kirov. A drunken guy tried to pick me up. He was handsome, but I can't stand drunks and just couldn't get rid of him. When he invited me to dance, I just turned my back on him and danced with the first man I came across. I never even looked at his face and asked him to dance. The man was my future husband. He was thin, small, frail, but a Jew! Boris Yankelevich, as I learned later. About his surname he said, as a joke, that I wouldn't ever guess what it was: Khokhlov. He courted me for three years. In the meantime, frankly, I had other admirers. But he proved to be insistent and won me with his attitude, intrinsic charm and ability to get tickets to any performance I would fancy. How on earth he managed to do it, I still don't understand. In 1963 Jerry Scott, the singer, came to Leningrad for the first time and tickets were impossible to obtain, but still he did that, and that determined my fate. I did agree!

My husband was born in December 1937. His father, Yankel Khokhlov, born in 1905, lived in Ukraine in the village of *Khokhlovka* – hence their family name. I do not know anything about his mother.

He worked in the same company, but in another department, in a laboratory. Later he had me transferred to his lab. He was a student of the Polytechnical Institute. He weighed a little over 40 kilograms then, one meter sixty three centimeters high. But the inherent charm, wits and sociability make him attractive to this day.

Our daughter Elena knew that she was a Jew from childhood. She encountered everyday anti-Semitism in school. When she was in the eighth grade, the geography teacher, quite a respected person, delivered a lecture explaining that Jews didn't take part in the Great Patriotic War. My daughter is a girl with principles, so she approached the teacher after the class and said that she didn't agree; her grandfather, a Jew, fought all through the war in the front lines and had been at Stalingrad. The teacher said she hadn't realized my daughter was Jewish. Then Lena asked: "And if you knew I was Jewish, would you have given that lecture?" The teacher said, "I would have sent you out of the classroom and given the lecture anyway – such was the order by the Party organization."

My daughter was an excellent pupil, the best in her class. She had been threatened for this, and once she even received a classmate's note saying that if she was going to do so well, they would beat her. I didn't keep silent either. I read that note at a general meeting of parents and said that if a hair fell from the head of my daughter, I wouldn't write petitions, I would just kill that child! Yes,

I'll make my own justice. They listened to me quietly. After that, my daughter didn't have any problems in her class.

To improve our living conditions, I used to go to the Malkov market and Sennaya Square, the meeting places for those who wanted to exchange their apartments. At last I managed to change our room for two rooms in a house, subject to general reconstruction a year later. Because we were Jewish, we, a family of four, were given a two-room apartment with adjacent rooms on the fifth floor in a house without a lift, in spite of the fact that my mother-in-law was 80.

Having finished school in 1982, my daughter entered the Leningrad Institute of Construction Engineering. She graduated in 1988 and was granted an honorary diploma. Her specialty is construction architecture. She worked in the "Promstroiproject" Institute. That was during *perestroika*. Many Jews were thinking of leaving the country. That's why she, having married a Jewish boy Mark Korenblit, left with him for Israel in 1990.

As a loving mother, I was very upset. She left home for the first time in her life. Due to my "secret" job I couldn't join them. When my bosses learned about my daughter's departure, they lowered the secrecy grade of my whole laboratory, and I had a lot of trouble. They couldn't simply dismiss me because I had the secret seal, which I could give back only after dismissal. I was treated badly, but I wouldn't quit the job. I knew that if I did, I wouldn't be able to get another. I only had only three years left to retirement. As a "blockade child," I had the right to retire two years early, that is, when I was 53. In the end, they even had to promote me as a valuable executive. Having worked for 25 years at that enterprise, I retired in 1993.

I was very happy when I heard of the fall of the Berlin Wall. My family and I realized that the Jewish wall also collapsed at that time – the wall separating the Soviet Union and Israel. This opened the way for us to get to know our "promised land." Our circle of acquaintances became broader and included a lot of people who had been there. Lecturers began to disclose more truthful information about Israel. While the USSR had turned this country into a foul place in 80 years, Israel managed to transform deserts into flourishing gardens in 50. We have recovered our spirits. We attend performances dedicated to Jewish holidays. On Sukkot and Hanukah, we go to the synagogue. We enjoy Jewish music. With its sounds, my heart melts and my soul rejoices.