

# Grigoriy Golod

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Kiev

Ukraine

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Grigoriy Golod lives in a big house that he built himself in the resort town of Vorzel, 40 km from Kiev. There is a swing, a small pergola with grapes and a swimming pool with no water in it - everything has a touch of decay.

Grigoriy had a stroke, and his adopted daughter and son-in-law don't look after the house. He is rather upset about it. His house is very clean and there are all modern comforts: hot water and heating. The house is nicely furnished. Grigoriy is a tall thin man with shrewd eyes. He has not quite recovered: he can only walk with a stick and makes pauses while talking, but he has bright memories.

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## My family background

Our family comes from Khvoyniki near Gomel in Belarus. I never met my grandparents. All I know is that my grandfather on my father's side, Gershl Golod, was a tailor. There must have been a conflict in my father's family because my father never told me about them. When I asked him once he replied that they were bad people, and he didn't want to talk about them. I remember that my father's brother came to see my father once, and they had a terrible argument. My father's brother left, and some money and valuables disappeared from our house with him.

My father, Iosif Golod, was born in Khvoyniki in 1902. Khvoyniki was a small village in Belarus. There were 30 Jewish families, who peacefully resided in the village. The Jews were craftsmen. There were Russian, Belarus and Polish inhabitants in the village, and all nationalities respected each other's traditions and faith. There was a synagogue and a cheder in the village. Like all other Jewish boys my father finished cheder and Jewish elementary school. When he was 14 he took over his father's profession. He became a tailor and left his parents' house for good. He rented a room. He had a sewing machine and quite a few clients.

My mother's parents, Bencion and Hana also lived in Khvoyniki. My grandfather owned a haberdashery. The family was quite wealthy. My mother told me that they lived in a big two-storied house with the store on the first floor. They had a housemaid and a cook. They didn't grow any vegetables or keep livestock. They could afford to buy all necessary food at the market. The family

was only moderately religious: they seldom went to the synagogue and only observed bigger holidays. My mother had some brothers and sisters, but I only knew her younger sister, Sarah.

Khvoyniki was a small village, but pogroms [1](#) happened there every now and then. Bandits came to the village to rob its inhabitants of their meagre belongings. During a pogrom in Khvoyniki in 1918, arranged by Petliura soldiers [2](#), my grandparents and my mother's sisters and brothers were killed. The bandits demanded food and valuables. My grandmother gave them all she had, but then the bandits killed the whole family stabbing them with bayonets. Only my mother and Sarah survived. My mother was pregnant at that time and hiding in the attic. Sarah ran to the fields in the outskirts of the village. She was followed by Petliura military who were shooting at her. Sarah was wounded but a Belarus family gave her shelter and nursed her back to health. After the revolution of 1917

After that Sarah lived in Gomel. She married Haim Rozhavskiy, a Jewish man. In 1937 they moved to Kiev, bought a small room and took to their business. He was a tailor, and she was a dressmaker. They didn't have any children due to Sarah's wounds from the pogrom. The bullet had injured some vital organs and wasn't removed from her body until 1956. During the Great Patriotic War [3](#) Sarah and her husband were in evacuation. After the war they returned to Kiev. Sarah and her husband died in the middle of the 1980s.

My mother, Enta, was born in 1903. I don't know where she studied, but she had some education: she could read and write in Russian and Yiddish and told me about outstanding Russian writers. She may have finished a grammar school. She had known my future father since they were children. They fell in love with one another in their teens and got married in 1918, before the pogrom during which my mother's parents died. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and a rabbi, a number of guests and klezmer musicians. My parents settled down in my grandfather's house. My older brother, David, was born in 1919. It was hard for my mother to live in Khvoyniki where her family had perished. She convinced my father to move to Kiev. They sold their house, hired a horse-driven cab, moved to Kiev in 1922 and bought an apartment there.

## Growing up

I was born in Kiev on 4th August 1922. We lived in Fundukleevskaya Street in the center of the city. After Lenin died (2) the street was named after him. I have dim memories of our apartment: there was a room with my father's Singer sewing machine and his desk for cutting fabrics in the middle of the room. My father didn't allow me to touch his sewing machine because it was his precious working tool. He worked as a fabric cutter at the garment factory and did some work at home to make some extra money. My mother also did some sewing at home for her clients. When my father was at work she allowed me to turn the wheel of my father's sewing machine.

There was also a small kitchen with a kerosene stove where my mother did her cooking. My sister, Sima, was born in this apartment in 1925, and Betia followed in 1927. When I was 5 years old we moved to another apartment because our previous apartment was expropriated by the town authorities and given to an aviation club. Although there were two rooms this apartment was worse than our previous one: it was in the basement of a house, there was no kitchen, the stove was in one of the rooms and the stack came out through the window.

Our father was a gloomy and withdrawn man. I don't remember him playing or talking with his children after he came home from work. He hardly ever talked with our mother either. She often

cried, and only when I grew up did I get to know that my father was unfaithful to her. He always had other women. My mother was sickly, even when she was young, and when she grew older she developed heart problems. Every now and then she got pale and gasped for breath. She went to bed, and I was standing beside her bed fearing that she might die. I loved my mother more than anybody in the world. My father provided well for the family and my mother could have been a housewife, but she worked at home nonetheless. She was proud and independent. I often accompanied her when she went to see her clients, and they jokingly called me 'Mom's fiancé'. She had Jewish, Russian and Ukrainian clients.

My father cared for my mother in his own way. He had a Ukrainian friend in Marianovka named Tkachenko, who came to Khvoyniki to sell pork and buy essential goods. When our academic year at school was over we all, except for my father, went to Marianovka on a horse- driven cart. We had a stock of food with us and spent our summer vacations living in the house of Tkachenko. We went to the woods and to the river. Our landlord's son, Grigoriy, became my friend. We were the same age. In the late 1930s, Grigoriy came to work at a plant in Khvoyniki and lived with us. We enjoyed spending time together in the village and didn't question our national origin. I also had Ukrainian friends in town. Some of them became my friends for a lifetime.

My parents weren't religious. They spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian to us [children], but we also knew Yiddish well. My father worked on Saturdays. We didn't know a thing about kosher food. We only celebrated Pesach. Our father brought matzah home in advance. My mother made gefilte fish that were so delicious that I can still remember its smell and taste. She also made chicken broth, fruit jelly and pastries from matzah flour. On Pesach my father came home early, washed himself, put on a clean shirt and the family sat down at the table. We just had a festive dinner, he never told us about the holiday or any other Jewish traditions or holidays.

Sometimes my mother's sister, Sarah, invited us on holidays. Her family was truly religious. Her husband Haim had tallit, tefillin and ancient thick Yiddish books in heavy bindings. Haim worked as a tailor at the children's department store and couldn't go to the synagogue every day, but he prayed at home. I remember how he and Sarah gave us sweets and money on Chanukkah. Uncle Haim went to the Brodskiy Synagogue in the center of Kiev. Sometimes he gave me tickets for the amateur Jewish theater at the synagogue - they mainly gave performances on Purim.

Haim and Sarah took work back home and were always concerned that a tax inspector might visit them. In the late 1920s the Soviet power persecuted small businesses. Audits were a common practice to force private businessmen to go to work at state enterprises rather than develop their own businesses. Heavy taxation and endless audits and penalties forced businessmen to either close their shops or conceal their work activities from authorities. When my mother and I were visiting them my mother always knocked on their window and only after did that they open the door. My mother wasn't afraid, even though she also did some work at home. She used to say that no inspector would want to come to the terrible basement where we lived. She was right, as no auditors ever visited us in all those years when we lived in this apartment.

## **My school years**

I was a sickly boy. I started going to the Jewish lower secondary school in Shevchenko Boulevard in 1931. It was an ordinary secondary school with the only difference that we studied in Yiddish. My schoolmates were Jewish children, but I also had Russian friends, who lived in our neighborhood.

I remember the famine of 1933 [the famine in Ukraine] [43](#). My father bought potato peels and makukha [wastes from sunflower oil production] which was our only food for a long while. My father also received some honey bread at the factory, but it tasted like machine oil rather than honey. He divided it into equal parts to give it to us. There were four beggars in our yard in the corner of Lenin and Chkalov Streets: two men and two women. One woman had an open putrefying injury on her leg which was a terrible sight. Later one man and woman died, and their corpses were lying beside their companions for a whole day. Then coupons for 400 grams of bread were introduced and things became slightly better. My sisters and I went to get the bread and usually there was a smaller piece of makeweight bread in the ration. Sometimes we ate on our way home, and sometimes we gave this makeweight of bread to the beggars. During those hard times Sarah and Haim took our sister Sima to their home. She stayed with them afterwards. They simply adored her and were raising her like their own daughter.

I studied well, but I often got poor marks. When I was in the 5th grade our Jewish school was closed, like the schools of many other nationalities. The Soviet power led a struggle against religion [5](#) that way. Over the next two years I went to three different schools. I was a trouble-maker and expelled from every school. However, I became a pioneer and was responsible for the collection of scrap. Before finishing school I became a Komsomol [6](#) member because my father said it would be good for my future career. I remember receiving a Komsomol membership card in the district Komsomol committee. It was quite a festive ceremony.

I had many Ukrainian and Russian friends. In the schools where I studied the last years of my education there were only a few Jewish children, and I didn't select friends on the basis of nationality. My friends and I attended an aviation club where we made replicas of airplanes that we set off on Trukhanov island on the Dnipro River. I was also fond of football and liked to go to football matches. Sometimes my father bought me a ticket, but when I had no ticket I joined a bunch of friends and we managed to get into the stadium without tickets.

My friends and I also went to parades on 1st May and 7th November, the anniversary of the October Revolution [7](#). After parades we went to dance clubs. I dreamed of going to university after finishing school, but my mother was often ill and couldn't work and my father distanced himself from the family. My older brother, David, was a mechanic at the telephone station, and I got a job as a courier at the district financial department. I was to deliver receipts and subpoenas, and I enjoyed my work. I met with my friends afterwards and always had my dinner waiting for me on the table, covered with a white napkin, when I came home from work.

In 1939 my mother died. After another row with my father she had a heart attack. She was taken to hospital where she died shortly after. David served in the Northern Navy, so I was the oldest in the family and felt responsible for my sisters. I remember my mother's funeral: the neighbors were crying but nobody said a prayer and there was no rabbi. My mother was carried out of the house and to the Jewish cemetery. We went there on foot and returned in the evening. When we were having dinner with my father his mistress came. I knew about her from our neighbors and believed her to be the cause of my mother's death.

She wanted my younger sister, Betia, to live with her. Now I understand that she wanted to help us, but back then I just told her to get out of our house. I had a terrible argument with my father and even made an attempt to fight with him after having a bit of vodka. The memory of my mother

stopped me from doing so. Later my friend Shurka and I went to break the windows of this woman's home. I don't know her name. Yiddish and everything else associated with my Jewish identity died along with my mother. I was a typical Soviet internationalist and atheist.

When my father became a widower we expected him to get married again, but as it often happens after losing one's wife, he began to miss her bitterly. He didn't remarry. He met with his mistress, but he never brought her home. He got a job at a shop in Lenin Street and she often waited for him there at the end of his working day.

After my mother died I began to look for a better-paid job. I became an apprentice to a lathe mechanic at the 43rd Aviation Plant. I commuted to work by tram. At that time one could be severely punished for being late for work. Public transportation was overcrowded, so I often went hanging on the rear of a tram. I got a good salary. Although my relationship with my father was tense, I gave him a part of my salary for my sisters' food. He bought me boots and a suit from my first salary.

We had a neighbor, a German woman called Clara, who had a daughter named Inga. Inga was confined to bed; she was kind of paralyzed. I often went to see her: I read books to her and told her about the movies I had seen. I liked the girl a lot and dreamed that I would get some magic medicine that would cure her.

I had friends at the plant. Lyonia Kornin, my co-worker, introduced me to his friends. They were four Russian men, including Lyonia, one Jewish man and four Jewish girls: the sisters Ida, Genia, Sonia and Mirrah Geihtman. We often got together at the sisters' home. Their old hunchbacked mother enjoyed seeing us and often treated us to some food. We drank a little beer or wine, played cards and dominoes, had tea and sweets and went to a discotheque. That's how I met Mirrah Geihtman, my future wife. Her father perished during the Civil Wars [8](#). She came from a Jewish family, but they weren't religious. They only spoke Russian and didn't observe any traditions. I liked Mirrah a lot, but her mother didn't really want me to be Mirrah's friend. I guess, she wanted a wealthy fiancé for her daughter while I, in her opinion, was poor and didn't deserve her daughter. We liked going to the cinema and watched all popular Soviet movies of the time: 'Tractor- Drivers', 'Circus', 'The Merry Guys' and others. They were nice movies. In general, the bunch of us led a merry life.

## The war begins

We were far from being interested in politics and didn't even notice that in 1937 people began to disappear - the period of Stalin's repression began [the so-called Great Terror] [9](#). Some workers at the plant were arrested as enemies of the people. We had neighbors one floor up: a barber, his wife and daughter. I don't know what wrong he might have done or said, but one night he was arrested and a few days later his wife and daughter were taken away. Other neighbors stole all their belongings after they were gone. Our janitor, Gladkikh, took their big piano. We never saw them again. Clara and Inga also disappeared. We were young and careless and didn't give much thought to what was going on. We thought that the authorities knew what they were doing and that they probably were just and fair in their actions.

There were meetings at the plant where we were told about Hitler and a likely war. We were told how quickly the Germans occupied countries, but nobody could believe that they would dare to

attack our country. Information of this kind was not released to the public. Meetings were only held at military enterprises and in military organizations. Our plant was a military enterprise, and its management was supposed to inform us on any major case so that we were aware of how to behave in the case of a war. When our troops entered Western Ukraine in 1940 the people in our house didn't sleep for a whole night - there were a few military that rose alarm. Special military couriers notified military units on any military alarms.

Although there were discussions about the war and military trainings, we didn't quite believe in the possibility of a war. We were sure that our country was strong and powerful enough to prevent any attack. Of course, the war came as a surprise. Of course, the war came as a surprise. On the night of 22nd June 1941 I worked a nightshift at the plant. The first bomb fell on a training airfield near our plant. The plane was flying over our plant for quite some time making a terrible noise. We even saw swastikas on its body.

I worked at the military plant and its employees weren't subject to recruitment to the army. For the next five days we excavated trenches and began to disassembly our equipment preparing it for evacuation. Before our departure we were allowed to drop by our homes to pack our things. We were short of time, so I grabbed whatever I could. By that time my father had already been recruited to the Territorial Army - they were volunteers that were on the frontline enabling our regular army to take time to retreat. Most of them perished, but he happened to be at home at the moment. My father left me his warm coat that he had had for many years, and we said goodbye. It wasn't the warmest farewell, but I still felt that my father was the closest person I had back then. My sisters were visiting relatives. I didn't see Mirrah either; she and her mother were already in evacuation. There was a railroad spur near the plant where we loaded the equipment of the plant onto open platforms and got in railcars ourselves.

The trip took us almost a month. We reached Novosibirsk [2,500 km east of Kiev] where we unloaded our things onto the site of the Chkalov [10](#) Aviation Plant. Families and younger girls got accommodation in a neighborhood of the town and we stayed in barracks. There were young people from many aviation enterprises from all over the country. There was a young man from Leningrad and another one from Riga [Latvia]. Grigoriy Tkachenko, who was a friend of mine when we were children, was also in evacuation with me. I got along well with him, although we weren't closest friends any longer. We assembled equipment units, installed them under tents and started manufacturing equipment for the military aviation. I made pistols for plane engines. After a day's work we just fell onto our plank beds. There were no water or food supplies. We worked three shifts, and I slept at my work place to save time. It was an outburst of enthusiasm to work for the victory of our people.

I had no information about my family. Once, in August 1941, I received a letter which said that Sima and Aunt Sarah evacuated to Alma-Ata [Kazakhstan], and Betia was taken by my father's mistress. She wanted my father to go with them, but my father refused and stayed in Kiev - he wanted to defend his hometown. I stayed in Novosibirsk for a few months. Then I decided that if I went to the front and perished, there would be nobody to grieve for me, but if I was to survive, I would surely become a hero. I went to the registry office, applied to go to the front and left on 17th November 1941.



I stayed at the gathering post for 20 days. At the beginning of December we got onto the train and went to the training camp of the 21st Ski Brigade located in the old barracks of the tsarist army. [Editor's note: The Ski Brigade consisted of military troops moving on skies and mobiles in winter conditions.]

We were trained to ski and shoot for a month and a half, and then I was assigned to a mortar platoon. We were heading for the Bologoye station of the Northwestern front near Leningrad. We walked 400 kilometers to the town of Staraya Russa. We had warm clothing: heavy coats, trousers lined with cotton wool, hats, woolen gloves and wool hat liners. We dragged our machine guns on scrapers. There was a special military unit following us to make sure that nobody remained behind. They declared those that remained behind deserters. I rubbed my heel sore, but had to ignore the pain. When we reached the town I was sent to hospital. After I was released I was assigned to a field bakery as a laborer. It baked bread for the division, and I got sufficient food there. I worked there for a year and a half until I got better.

When it was time for me to return to my former military unit I didn't find it at the old address - it had moved somewhere else. I returned to the bakery. After a few days I moved to the front in the Kursk curve with the 9th Air Force infantry division. I was assigned to the company of the machine gunners of the division. We were trained and arrived at the frontline on 12th July 1943 at Steпноy, and, later at the Ukrainian front. When we arrived there was action near Prokhorovka. Before my first battle I became a member of the Communist Party without thinking very much about it. The procedure was such that we were given party membership cards without any ceremonies. Everybody in the army wanted to become a party member.

On 16th July we were brought into action. I took part in the liberation of Ukraine from the fascists: I was in Poltava, Kharkov, Kremenchug, Dnepropetrovsk, Alexandria, Kirovograd and other towns. I was promoted to private first class and then junior sergeant. After the commanding officer of our platoon was killed, I replaced him. In Alexandria I was awarded a medal 'For Courage', and I received the order of the 'Red Banner' for the liberation of Kirovograd. The war was coming to an end.

In the spring of 1944 the commander of our division assigned me to be an orderly for Chief of General Staff Colonel Melnichenko. I was his orderly until May 1944. Then I was sent to a military infantry college. In Tashkent, Uzbekistan [2,500 km from Ukraine], we were told to get off the train and searched - they told us to give away our weapons and knives. I reached Ashgabat. I stayed there until the end of the war and served in the army for some time after the Great Patriotic War was over. 9th May 1945 [the end of the war] was a great event. I was a cadet and we [men] had tears in our eyes. We hugged each other and were as happy as one can be. We were to become professional military and spent a lot of time doing physical training, learning about new military equipment and techniques. We lived in barracks - 40 cadets in one huge facility with bunk beds. I was the only Jew, but nobody cared about nationality. There were representatives of over 20 nationalities from all over the USSR.

## Post-war

When I was in college I received a letter from my brother David from hospital. He had lost his leg and arm at the front. He asked me to write a permit for the return of our apartment, as I had been the last one to leave at the beginning of the war. I wrote the document and had it stamped at the

headquarters of the division. He got the permit, returned home and married Ida, one of our friends. She and her mother moved into our apartment.

David sold fabrics that his wife Ida and her mother brought from Moscow. There were no fabrics sold in stores, and he sold them at a higher price. David didn't like this work, but his wife and her mother insisted that he did it for them. He came home from the market drunk every evening and threw 3 and 5 ruble banknotes onto the sofa. It was hard for me to watch him being so degraded.

I finished college at the beginning of 1947 and got a one-month leave. I went to Kiev. I stayed with my brother for two days. My return home was bitter. Our neighbors came to see me. One of them, Luba, who was a cleaning woman during the occupation, told us that my father and a friend of his came back home when the Germans were in the city. Our janitor, Gladkih, reported on them to the Germans. They hung them in the central square to frighten the others. They were hanging there for several days. I tried to find the janitor to take revenge for my father, but he had disappeared.

A Jewish woman, Tsylia, and her son Yura, who was my friend before the war, lived in our street. Her Russian husband worked at the radio committee. When the Germans came to take away the Jews in our neighborhood her husband stood by her. He was shot along with Tsylia and Yura in the yard of their house.

My sister Sima and Aunt Sarah were still in evacuation. Betia returned to Kiev from evacuation. She lived with my father's mistress. Betia didn't receive any education. She worked at a dry cleaner's shop. She married Michael Ostrovskiy, a Jewish man, and they had a daughter, Luba. Betia, her husband and their daughter Luba moved to New York in 1987. David was selling fabrics that his wife Ida and her mother brought from Moscow. There were no fabrics sold in stores and he sold them at higher price. David didn't want this work, but his wife and her mother insisted that he did this work for them. He came home from the market drunk every evening and threw 3 and 5-ruble banknotes on the sofa. It was hard for me to watch him so degraded.

Sima and Aunt Sarah returned from evacuation in 1947. Sima finished a trade school and worked at a plant. In the 1950s she married Boris Zisels, a nice Jewish man, and they had a son, Joseph. Aunt Sarah died in the 1980s. Sima treated her like a mother. I can't explain why, but we didn't communicate with them. Sima, her husband and son moved to America in 1992.

Mirrah heard that I had returned to Kiev from our mutual acquaintance and came to see me on the 3rd day. We began to see each other. In Kiev I fell ill with malaria and I prolonged my leave for two months. I had to go to hospital. When I was released Mirrah and her mother came to pick me up. Her mother changed her mind about me - there weren't many admirers left after the war, and she was glad that I was there.

Their family lived in a big room. Mirrah's mother and father slept on a bed near the door, Mirrah slept on her bed and I slept on the sofa. After a few days Mirrah told her mother that she didn't want to sleep apart from me. Her mother got angry, but the following night Mirrah came to sleep on the sofa next to me. This lasted for several days. During the day Mirrah and I went for walks and in the evening we went to the Opera House or to the Musical Comedy Theater.

Mirrah's uncle had connections in the city. He arranged a 10-day extension of my leave. It was a difficult period in the country. There was a famine almost like the one in 1933. My situation was not



too bad: I received tinned meat, butter, candy and cereals through my officer's coupons. One day I came to the commandant's office to collect my officer's coupons and the commandant congratulated me on my marriage. I didn't understand a thing first, but when I opened my passport I saw a marriage stamp of the civil registry office. I realized that Mirrah's mother had taken my passport to have it stamped for a bribe while Mirrah and I were sleeping. I felt awe-struck, but I didn't say anything to her.

When it was time for me to leave I told Mirrah that she was my wife and had to go with me. Her mother was mad at me and didn't let her go. I left on my own. In Ashgabat I became the commandant of a platoon. I served for some time, and then I was sent to an advanced officer training school in Fergana [Uzbekistan]. Mirrah joined me - she left after she had a row with her mother. We rented a room near the fortress. I covered our bed with my uniform coat and we lived there for two weeks.

When we returned to Ashgabat I became the commanding officer of a company. We rented a room in a house near the military unit. Our landlady had a big family: three daughters, two sons and their children. One night in 1948, when we were asleep, a terrible earthquake happened. Mirrah fell out of the bed. A beam fell on my arm and broke it. All four children of our landlady perished, but she survived. She was 85 years old. My company perished under the debris of the barrack - all except for one platoon that I had punished and ordered to march on the parade ground. They survived. I was severely injured and sent to hospital in Tashkent. After I recovered a medical commission issued a certificate for me stating that I was partially fit for service in the army. Mirrah returned to Kiev, because she didn't have a place to live while I was in hospital. The same year she gave birth to our son, Yuri. She wasn't going to come where I was. Her mother said that the child wouldn't feel comfortable in Turkmenistan without the necessary living conditions.

I was to be sent to serve in Eastern Germany, but officers had to go there with their families. At that time I had a girlfriend named Lena. I said goodbye to her and went to the headquarters in Tashkent to have my documents processed for Germany. At the headquarters I confessed that I had a wife, but that we were separated and she wasn't going to Germany with me. Instead of Germany I was assigned to a disciplinary battalion for military criminals. I became the commander of a company there. Mirrah came to me with her mother and our small son, Yuri. Everything would have been fine if it hadn't been for Mirrah's mother, who was continuously setting Mirrah against me. She demanded that I retired from the army to go back to Kiev. I explained to her that I was a professional military and that the state spent a lot of money on my education. I told her that if I decided to retire from the army, the Soviet authorities might view it as a desertion and I might get into prison. She didn't understand and left. Mirrah followed her shortly afterwards with the excuse that there were better climatic conditions in Kiev for Yuri.

At that time Lena, my girlfriend, went to see my commander of the military unit to complain about me. She decided that Germany was an excuse for me to leave her. The commander called me and asked whether I knew the girl. I said that I saw her for the first time. If I had told the truth I would have been charged of immoral conduct, expelled from the Party and dismissed from the army. My commanders wanted to catch me and sent a man to keep me under surveillance.

Mirrah didn't return, and I didn't have an opportunity to communicate with my son. He wasn't eager to see me - he was taught not to think good of me. I met a nice Russian woman, Taisia

Ogasian. She came from Voronezh, a small Russian town. She finished a secondary school and an accounting course. She was in evacuation in Tashkent and worked as an accountant. After the war she stayed in Tashkent. Taisia was married. Her husband perished at the front. Her mother was raising their daughter. We began to see each other and fell in love. Taisia came to live with me. I wrote Mirrah in Kiev to ask her for a divorce. She wrote that I was unfaithful and immoral to my military unit.

It was a customary thing in the former USSR to have personal issues resolved by public or party organizations. There were even administrative penalties for immoral conduct applied to those that broke the rules. Adultery was not tolerated by the public. I got a strict reprimand, which was incorporated in my personal files. That meant that I couldn't have any further promotions. I couldn't stay at the disciplinary battalion either, as I was considered unreliable. I was sent to a military office in Tikhmirskiy kishlak [Uzbek for village] near Bukhara.

The military commandant there was an Uzbek man, Lieutenant-Colonel Ichkerov. He didn't know Russian. The other employees of the office were Russian. Very soon I realized that Ichkerov took advantage of our ignorance. Uzbeks came to talk with him about their children's service in the army. He accepted bribes for the release from service in the army. I never accepted any gifts and people respected and liked me. I was the only Jew there, but I never faced any anti-Semitism throughout my service. I forgot about my Jewish identity - we were all equal and supported each other. Taisia was with me. She worked as an accountant in various offices. We couldn't get married, because Mirrah didn't respond to my numerous requests to divorce me.

In 1956 when 300,000 officers were dismissed from the army at Khrushchev's [11](#) order, including me, and Taisia and I went back to Kiev. We arrived on 7th November. I was wearing summer shoes, and she wore a summer dress. First of all I went to see my brother David. It turned out that he had passed away in 1950. He died of gangrene.

I went to the district party committee to get registered and get a job. They refused to register me or issue a residential permit [12](#) because I wasn't recruited to the army. I couldn't get a job without a residential approval. I spent a few months without a job or a place to live. My pre-war friend, Shura, gave us a temporary shelter. I began to look for residential opportunities in the outskirts of the city. I met a frontline comrade of mine who was the director of the training base of the Academy of Sciences in Vorzel, a town where Kievites usually spent their summer vacations.

He employed me. I was responsible for filling tractors with fuel. We got a residential permit to reside in Vorzel and a plot of land to build a house. One part of the house was completed in 1959. In 1961 Mirrah finally gave me a divorce. Although I had always sent her money to provide for my son, she said in court that I didn't give them money. The court made the decision that I was to pay 50% alimony from my salary instead of the standard 25%.

I got a job at a scientific research institute in Kiev. I was a mechanic until I retired. I was only a formal party member before I retired - I took no interest in any party activities. My membership was limited to the payment of monthly fees and attendance of party meetings. I usually read a newspaper at such meetings. Attendance was compulsory.

Taisia and I got along well. Her daughter, Rimma, who lived in the north with her husband, came to us when she gave birth to her baby. Regretfully she died at childbirth in 1972. Taisia and I adopted

her daughter, Natasha. Rimma's husband had no objections because he got remarried shortly after Rimma died. When Natasha grew up I told her that I was her adoptive father. She hugged and kissed me and said, 'You've always been and will always be my Daddy'.

I never saw Mirrah after the trial in 1961 and don't want to know anything about her anyways. My son Yuri came to see me at the institute several times to ask for money. While I was giving him money he came to see me, but when I fell ill he stopped even calling me. He went to study at the Institute of Forestry in Moscow in the 1970s. He got married and stayed in Moscow. He lives in Moscow Region with his wife and two children: Pavel and Nikita. He never came to visit me.

My wife Taisia died in 1999. Natasha loves me dearly and her daughter, Katia, and husband, Yuri, are my family. We live together. I have refurbished my house many times. I am leaving it to Natasha. A year ago I had a stroke. Natasha quit her job to look after me. She helped me to recover, and I am learning to walk and speak again.

In the 1990s the Party was dismissed, and I threw my party membership card away. Perestroika was a breath of fresh air and freedom. We could read books that were not allowed before, speak our mind and hear about life abroad. We were even allowed to travel, but most people couldn't due to lack of money. Jews began to feel better though. There are Jewish organizations and newspapers. The synagogues are open, and there are many opportunities for people to lead a free life.

In recent years I've had a lot of free time and I've turned to the history of my family and Jewish people. I've never been interested in Jewish history or religion in my life, but now I feel a need to be closer to it. I receive Jewish newspapers and I'm a member of the Association of Jewish Culture. Natasha respects my belief, and on Pesach she buys matzah and cooks traditional Jewish food for me. I've never faced anti-Semitism in my life. If it weren't for my condition I would go to live in Israel. But I don't want to go there because I'm an invalid. I sympathize with the people of Israel. Many innocent people die - I can understand what they feel. I've been in the war and know what it's like.

## Glossary

### **1 Pogroms in Ukraine**

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

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

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

### **3 Great Patriotic War**

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

#### **4 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

#### **5 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

#### **6 Komsomol**

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

#### **7 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

#### **8 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the

Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

## **9 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **10 Chkalov, Valery (1904-1938)**

Russian test pilot, and hero of the Soviet Union. He developed several advanced aerobatic moves. In 1936-37 he conducted continuous, no-land flights between Moscow and Udd island (the Far East) and Moscow - North Pole - Vancouver (US). His plane crashed during a test flight.

## **11 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **12 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.