

Zoya Lerman

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Bronia Borodianskaya

My name is Zoya Naumovna Lerman. I was born in Kiev in 1934. My mother's name is Maria Arkadievna Lerman (maiden name - Gilik) and my father's name is Naum Borisovich Lerman. My mother was born in 1913. I have no information about her place of birth. My father was born in 1910. I have no information about his place of birth.



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My family history

I will begin my story from my father's family. My father lost his parents at an early age. There were two sisters and five brothers in the family and my father was the youngest child. Boris Lerman, my father's father, died and my father's mother disappeared. Yes, she just disappeared. She left and never came back. Nobody knew what happened to her. David, born in 1902, was the oldest. Their second son was Michael, born in 1904. Then came Semyon, born in 1906, and Jacob, born in 1908. My father Naum, born in 1910, was the youngest. I don't remember their sisters' dates of birth. I never met my father's sisters and know them only from what my father told me. One of them was called Rachil and another was Bertha. My father told me that Aunt Rachil was so beautiful that people couldn't help but stare at her in the street. On September 29, 1941 Rachil and her 4-year old daughter Zinochka (also a beauty like her mother) perished in the Babi Yar. Aunt Bertha was also killed there, but her son Boris, a teenaged boy, escaped execution. When Germans shot his family he rolled down the slopes of the ravine. They kept shooting but miraculously the bullets didn't hit him. Later, he crawled out of this pit clutching at some roots and vegetation. Then he got out of Babi Yar and left Kiev. In the 1950s my mother and father corresponded with him. He lived in Kuibyshev then. Once he even sent us a picture of himself and his two children. But then they somehow lost touch

with my family.

When my father was 13 or 14 years old, the children lost their parents. At that time David, the older brother, lived in Baku. He had a job as a tailor and he took my father to live with him. Later, my father went to some trade school (I don't know exactly what kind of school). All five brothers were educated, but I can't give you a more detailed description. In the late 1920s all five brothers were living in Kiev and I know more about their life at this period. They all had families, except Uncle Semyon who lived his life as a single man.

Uncle David was a tailor. He had a wife (I don't remember her name) and a daughter named Bronia. Uncle Syoma was in charge of an automatic telephone station which still exists. Uncle Yasha worked at the radio sound recording office for many years, for almost his whole life. I can't remember what Uncle Misha did for a living, but I have wonderful memories of his wife Margarita Evgenievna and his son Dusik.

During WWII my father and his brothers, except for Uncle David who was beyond recruitment age, went to the front. I will first tell you about my father's brothers. Misha and his son Dusik went to the front and perished there. Dusik was killed during the first days of the war. Margarita Yevgenievna lost her loved ones and went to work at the military college. The cadets were about the same age as her son, and she worked there for the rest of her life.

Uncle Semyon worked at the bridge construction team throughout the war. He survived and returned to his previous job after he returned from the war. He died at age 93 in 1999. I took care of him during the last years of his life. Uncle Yasha also went throughout the war and returned. After suffering shell-shock he was left with a hearing problem. That is all I know about my father's family. He never told anything else about their life.

My mother's parents lived in Ivankov. My grandmother on my mother's side, Leia (Elizaveta) Abramovna Gilik (maiden name Ofman), lost her mother when she was still a child. My grandmother was born in the late 1880's in Ivankov. There were many Jews living in Ivankov. But this was not a Jewish city. Jews and Russians and Ukrainians got along very well and helped each other. They were good neighbors. There was a synagogue in Ivankov but I had never been there.

Late in the first decade of the 1900s, my grandmother married Arkadiy Gilik. I know very little about my grandfather, only what my grandmother told me. My grandfather was born in 1886 and died in 1926, long before I was born. I can remember his face dimly from the photo of him that I saw once. My grandmother told me that he was great at woodcarving. His carving

decorated cupboards and pieces of furniture, etc. My grandmother described his patterns in every detail to me. He used to carve pheasants or fruit and climbing vines on the doors. My grandfather died quite young, when he was about 40 years old. He may have died from cholera or some other disease.

My grandfather and grandmother were religious people. They went to synagogue, although I don't know how often. They always celebrated the Sabbath and traditional Jewish holidays at home.

My grandparents had six children: two sons and four daughters. After my grandfather died my grandmother had to raise their children alone. I knew both of the brothers, Uncle Grisha and Uncle Motl, and the sisters, Evgenia, Faina and Raissa. My grandmother never remarried.

The family moved to Kiev around 1918 when my mother was five years old. Here's how it happened. The gang of Struk, a leader of one of the many White Guard gangs in Ukraine, came to Ivankov. And this Struk sent his bandits to steal my grandmother's cow. But my grandmother had to feed her children. So, she went to see this Struk and told him to give back her cow. Struk told her to go home and said that everything would be there. My grandfather came home and told her the story to her neighbor. He was an older and more experienced Jewish man. He said Leia, are you out of your mind? They will come and kill you and your children. He advised the two older boys to go hide somewhere (I don't remember where) through the woods and brought a horse and a cart to my grandmother in which to hide her daughters. She piled some hay and rags on top of them and their neighbor rode them out of Ivankov. He was a nice man. It's a pity that I don't know his name. He rescued the whole family. He took them to the station and told them to try and get to Kiev. And my grandmother took her children to Kiev. I don't know how she managed. She settled down at 12, Mikhailovskaya Street, Kiev in an apartment on the ground floor. It was very low and the windows were not higher than one meter above the ground. We lived our whole life in that apartment. There was one big room facing the street. There was another room with no windows and a smaller room with one window facing the yard. Uncle Motl lived in this room for some time after the war. There was a long hallway in this apartment with a door to the closet in the middle of it. The hallway led to the kitchen.

When she was a young girl my grandmother was eager to study. She had no opportunity to study because her mother died, and as my grandmother was the oldest of the children, she had to take care of all her brothers and sisters. She sometimes came near the school. She looked and listened. She learned Russian when she was 60. She learned to read and write and she wrote her daughters in Lvov and she also wrote my father and mother. My grandmother's dream was to provide higher education to her children. She needed money to implement this dream. So, she began to bake rolls at home and sold them to earn money. She opened one window, made a sort of a

counter on the windowsill and installed a partial wall in the room. She had very little space, just a few meters long. From this window, she was sold the rolls that she baked. Sometimes people came at night to buy her rolls. They were very delicious. My grandmother also made hamentashen pies (little triangle pies with poppy seeds), strudels and pies. She managed to educate her children. I don't know exactly what kind of education their children got, but it was higher education. My mother completed three years at the cinematography institute and also took a course in shorthand writing. She became one of the best and fastest stenographers in Kiev. I don't know how or where my parents met. They married in 1932 in a civil registration ceremony. They settled in the apartment at Mikhailovskaya Street. Soon after their wedding, my father was summoned to serve in the army. I believe he served in Petersburg. My mother went there on the weekends because she missed him so much. This is what my mother told me. My father wrote poems and dedicated them to my mother. He also painted very well when he was young.

My mother became an administrator with the Philharmonic. I don't know where my father worked before the war. My mother's brothers and sisters all lived in Kiev, except Raissa. Her sisters were already married. Aunt Fania (Faina) and her husband lived in Kreschatik. She was a seamstress in a shop. Aunt Zhenia and her family also lived nearby. Aunt Zhenia, she worked at the Regional Association of Consumers. Aunt Raissa married a military man and followed him to Moscow. Several years later, her husband was promoted to the rank of general. Aunt Raya followed him everywhere, as he had to move from one location to another. I cannot say anything about my mother's brothers.

Growing up

I was born in 1934. My first memories are associated with my grandmother. My parents were at work and my grandmother was bringing me up. I remember the fairy tales that she told me when I was small. She told me stories from the Bible, but she told them in a fairy tale manner. I remember her telling me how people were going across a desert and could not find shelter. A woman gave them some flour and they got some water to make flat bread. They put these flat breads on their shoulders to dry in the sun. This was the food of these people. My grandmother also told me that these travelers came to a gate that was guarded by two lions. They somehow put these two lions to sleep and managed to go through the gate. Much later I learned that this was the story about Pesach (editor's note: we are not sure where the lions fit into the story of Pesach). My grandmother was a very wise and a very kind person. She resolved all problems in our family and my mother and father always listened to her advice.

We had neighbors in our apartment. We made a separate entrance door and walled up the door that connected our rooms and thus had an apartment of our own. All our neighbors liked and respected my grandmother. All our neighbors that had a common yard were like one big family. They were all of different nationalities but they were so close that in summer they rested on their camp beds in the yard at night. I can't remember how many Jewish families there were; I didn't quite pay attention to the nationality. However, I remember one family: Lidia, the mother, her children and her grandchildren. Lidia was the same age as my grandmother. Later this family emigrated to Israel. My grandmother always advised those who addressed her on various matters. She also helped her neighbors to resolve their problems. She always knew how to save money; she could give advice on medical treatment or on the upbringing of children. She was a very wise woman.

My grandmother always made her own clothes and the clothes for her daughters and me. Before the war my grandmother took me to the ballet school at the Opera House. I was in the junior group. She made me beautiful gauze tutus. The war in 1941 put an end to it all.

I often heard Yiddish at home. When my grandmother and my mother wanted to be secretive, they spoke Yiddish. My grandmother wore long, dark gowns. She always wore a shawl. Her favorite was a white silk shawl. She always wore it when she went to pray. My grandmother knew all the Jewish traditions and holidays, but she observed them all. She was afraid that somebody would report her to the authorities and that her family would suffer. There were always big festive dinners on big holidays. My grandmother was a great cook. I can't remember whether she cooked only traditional Jewish food, but I know that her cooking was delicious. She wasn't very religious. She went to synagogue only on holidays. I can't remember whether she prayed at home. I don't think she had time for that. She was always busy doing something. She worked from morning till night on weekdays and on Saturday. I don't remember her ever taking a rest. She had to earn money to provide for her family. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue. Those were the horrific 1930's in the period of struggle against religion. There was only one synagogue left of the three hundred that existed in Kiev before the revolution of 1917. Cult structures were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB (State security Committee) walls. My grandmother was afraid of it all. I remember one night. I was in my lower secondary school then. My grandmother got ready to leave the house and said that she would be back in the morning. I asked her where she was going, but she told me that I was not supposed to know. Much later she started telling me that she went to pray. I asked her to take me with her, but my grandmother would not agree to take me with her. She explained to me that I would not understand, and that there was a plain

room where people came to pray, and that there was nothing else in this room.

My grandmother did all the housekeeping. Our family income was very small but my grandmother managed to cook many delicacies. I remember her delicious strudels. She always treated our neighbors to her pies. Of course, my grandmother made apple-poppy seed pies and strudels with jam for birthdays.

I remember that our apartment was beautiful before the war. My father liked beautiful antiques. He decorated a very beautiful Christmas tree when I was small. It might have been a real Christmas tree, or a pine tree, whatever was available at the market. The Christmas tree was decorated to celebrate New Year's Eve. I also had beautiful toys. We had a beautiful screen in our big room. My little bed was behind it. My father and mother slept on the sofa. I still have our table that we had before the war.

During the War

I remember the beginning of the Great Patriotic War well. It started at night. My parents woke me up. I saw my father sitting on the sofa ready to put on his high boots. I asked him "Papa, where are you going?" but he smiled and didn't say a word. He only said "You will be taken to the basement." In the next building the basements were very deep and Uncle Syoma carried me there. My father had already left. There were many children and older people in that basement. I also remember that there was only one small lamp turned on when my father was getting ready. I remember the air raids and the sound of the airplane engines. Later my grandmother took us out of Kiev. We left on a truck. It was an open vehicle with a tarpaulin covering it on the rear. My cousin Arkadiy, Aunt Fania's son, was standing near the edge of the truck body. We four girls (me and my cousins Sveta, Stella and Natochka), were sitting in the middle to keep safe. We didn't have time to pack, so we hardly had any clothes with us. The truck drove us to a village and then went back. My grandmother put us to bed under a cart and wrapped us up in something to keep warm. We stayed overnight there. Then we traveled by railroad on some kind of platforms. They were loaded with steel slabs all covered in black oil (mazut) and we sat on those slabs. Then again we slept on the ground somewhere and then got back on trains. We changed trains five or six times and the trip took us about a month. My grandmother was taking us to Perm, where her older daughter Raissa lived. Her husband, a general, was in the service there, and Aunt Raya sent us a message to get to her place immediately.

In Perm we settled down in the clay barracks. It was very long. I think there were about ten doors on one side of the barracks and about the same number on another. At the very end there was a little room and we children stayed there.

Raya and her husband had a small apartment. Aunt Fania and her children, Natochka and Arkadiy, lived with her. Aunt Fania made men's underwear for the front. She was spending day and night at the sewing machine. Aunt Fania's husband was executed in Kiev by the Germans at the very beginning of the war.

My mother worked as a stenographer through all these years and she had contacts with Moscow for some reason. But she told me about it many years after the war. We rarely saw her. My grandmother did all housekeeping chores and looked after the children.

It was 30 degrees below zero in Perm. My cousin Svetochka's hands became frostbitten. My own hands and my feet were so frostbitten that I did not feel any pain when my grandmother and my neighbors pricked them with pins. We were so miserably dressed. I remember the snow was knee deep. It was cold in the barracks, less cold than outside, but still very cold.

There was not enough food. Once a local woman gave us a carton full of peas. But these peas were so old that my grandmother had to beat them with a hammer and soak them in water for a long time before she could cook them. Those peas lasted for some time. Later, when my mother went to work she received one pound of sugar that she had to divide between all of us. My cousins were the first to eat a lump of sugar, each sipping their boiling water. And I put my little bit into the cup and sat there waiting. They all pushed me, telling me to sip because it would melt! My grandmother also got potato and beet peels, ground them up and made something like pancakes. In spring we also picked up ashberries.

All the tenants of the barracks supported each other. They all had to share one common kitchen, but there were no conflicts.

All of us lived in one room. Planks were put between two iron beds and my grandmother covered them with whatever she had for us to sleep on overnight.

There were also things to enjoy. I remember an opera theater during the evacuation in Perm. There was a wonderful ballet group; there were world-reknowned ballerinas Ulanova and Palladina. Our friend's mother worked in this theater. She took us backstage from where we watched all the ballet performances.

I also remember that our grandmother took us girls--only Stella didn't go--to a music teacher. We were auditioned and the teacher told me and little Alla to stay. I don't remember the teacher's name or her nationality. My grandmother took me to music classes for quite a while. I had classes every night. Sometimes when I had a class later at night I felt sleepy but I still enjoyed playing music.

Now I will tell you about my father. At the beginning of the war my mother received a notification stating that my father was missing. My mother tore up this paper and said, He is alive! I don't believe this! He is alive! And she was right, he returned after all.

Here is what happened. In case of war, my father had to report to a certain office, which he did. There he received false documents bearing a typical Russian name--Nikolai Vassilievich Svistun. He was sent to a partisan unit. I can't remember all details. Well, at first he was in this partisan unit. Later, he was sent to the town of Chipovichi. My father was to support communications between two partisan units in the woods on both sides of Chipovichi. My father had to think of a profession he could perform when visited by the high-ranking German military, so my father became a barber. He lived with a family of Baptists in Chipovichi. There was a father and two sons in this family. But since they were Baptists, they did not have to serve in the army. A local Komsomol member reported to the Gestapo that my father was a partisan and a Jew. I don't know how he found out. Perhaps he knew my father before the war, or maybe somebody who worked with my father told him. This informer was a Komsomol member, so nobody suspected that he was working for the Germans and that he was a traitor. The Gestapo captured my father and tortured him. The members of the Baptist family my father had been living with came to the Gestapo every day to demand that they release my father. The mother of the family brought food to him every day. The Gestapo military threatened to shoot her and her sons, but she answered that they wouldn't do anything to them or to my father. And then the Germans let my father go. But they told him that if they caught him again they would shoot him. After the war these Baptists often visited us.

My father was on the edge of death again when the Germans wanted to check on whether he was a Jew. My father was circumcised according to the tradition, and an inspection would probably have resulted in my father's execution or his being sent to a concentration camp. But the doctor who worked in Chipovichi took my father to the barracks for typhoid patients, which the Germans wouldn't enter. She saved his life. Her name was Nina but I don't know her last name. She also visited us after the war. She was a slim middle-aged woman.

People saved my father's life many times. Once, a policeman came and told my father that at three o'clock the Germans would come to arrest him. My father didn't know whether this was true or just a provocation so that they could follow him to his hiding place, and so he was afraid to go to the partisans in the woods. Instead, he stayed put and the Germans captured him and took him to a place of execution. They shot my father and a whole group of other people. My father lay under the bodies of the dead. He was only slightly wounded, but was covered in the blood of the others who were

murdered. Later, my father crawled out of the pit. Another time, he was again captured and was about to be shot. It was afternoon. There was bright sunshine. There were two military escorts, and four people who were to be killed. My father and the three others were taken to a sandy spot. The military escorts gave them spades and told them to dig their own graves. While they were digging, the oldest of the intended victims told the others to throw sand into their guards' eyes and run. The moment the escort sat down for a cigarette break, they threw sand into their eyes and ran away, all in different directions. My father told me that he didn't know if the rest of the escapees survived. He was running and bullets were whistling around him. He ran for a long time and then fell, exhausted, into a pit. He woke up in the morning and didn't know where to go. He returned to the partisans in the woods and stayed with them until November 1943, until the end of occupation. He didn't work as a barber in that town any more.

My mother always believed that my father was alive, and she told all his friends that he was still living. In 1943 Semyon, my father's brother who worked in a bridge construction team, somehow learned that my father was alive. He wrote to us in Perm about it. We received a card from him. He wrote in small letters, but in the middle of it he wrote "Nyuma lives!" in big letters. I was just learning to read and read these two words to my Grandma. My grandmother clasped her hands and ran into the corridor. She knocked on our neighbors' doors shouting "Nyuma is alive! Nyuma is alive!" When my mother came home from work my grandmother declared, "You know, Manechka, Nyuma is alive!" and my mother replied "Yes, I knew that he was alive." In 1944 we received letters from my father and looked forward to his coming back. He demobilized from the army in 1946 and returned home. My father worked as a barber after the war. He worked at the central barber's shop.

After the War

At the beginning of 1944 my grandmother took us all to Kiev. Aunt Raissa and her husband stayed in Perm and later they moved to Moscow. I would like to tell you about my cousins who were in the evacuation with me. They were very dear to me. Stella (maiden name Feldman), the daughter of my mother's sister Evgenia, was educated at the Institute of Literature. She married a Russian doctor named Victor Averin. Victor worked at the maternity home. Although it was an ordinary district hospital, all high officials brought their wives to Victor. He worked so hard day and night, that it resulted in the severe disease of his legs. He couldn't work any more, and he was in despair. Stella decided to take him to America. Victor lived for two more years and then died. He didn't reach the age of 60. Their son Peter lives and works in the USA.

Natochka Miliavskaya (married name - Roiter), the daughter of my mother's sister Faina, lived in Kiev almost all her life. She worked as Chief of a shop at the knitwear factory. Her son, Boris Krasnov, a theatrical artist, moved to Moscow. He is popular in Russia and abroad. He works for the most famous performers. He often gets job offers from foreign companies. Natochka and her husband moved to join their son in Moscow. She sometimes visits us in Kiev.

Svetlana Feldman, Evgenia's daughter, studied at the mathematics and Physics Department of Kiev University. She was married and worked as a teacher of Physics and mathematics at school. Her son married, and his wife's family decided to move to Israel. Svetochka didn't want to go but she was afraid to remain here alone. So, she left, with her son's family in the 1970's to live in Israel. Later, they moved to the USA, but we never heard from then after that. I have no information about what they did for a living there, or how they lived.

Allochka Lev (married name - Uhlina), Raissa's daughter, lived in Moscow. She learned Italian, French and German languages. She works as translator/interpreter.

I don't remember any details of our return from evacuation. We returned to our former apartment in Mikhailovskaya Street. We were lucky that it was not occupied. Although it was almost empty, there was only one chair left. My father was offered another apartment but he said he preferred to live in his old apartment. We often had our parents' acquaintances staying with us when they returned and found their houses in ruins. They slept on the floor, it was as simple as that. After we returned to Kiev my mother was offered the position of stenographer at the Ministry of Culture.

In 1944 I went to school. I was admitted to the 3rd grade. It was a Russian school for boys and girls. We had a wonderful teacher, a very intelligent person. I studied only two years at this school. There were quite a few Jewish children at this school. There was no anti-Semitism at school. We didn't have a bell at school. There was a rail and they banged on it when the lesson was over. Our teacher, Anna Romanovna, always let me go some time before the end of the class, and I went and banged on this rail. Later Anna Romanovna paid attention to my drawings. I was in the 4th grade when she asked me to help senior students to make a wall newspaper. I was to help them draw Lenin. The senior children brought me a book with a portrait of Lenin and I made a rather big portrait of him for their newspaper. I also paint pictures for Anna Romanovna for her classes. She told me that I had to go to Kiev Art School. My mother and I went to this school. Its deputy Director looked through my pictures and I was admitted at this school.

There were up to 10 children in a class at the art school. Of course, my favorite subject was drawing. But I was fond of other subjects too. Our French teacher, Louise Edmond, came from France. She always had her hair done so beautifully. My French was good and I was all right in mathematics.

I became a pioneer and then a Komsomol member at the art school. But we were not required to be involved in any political activities; we didn't even have a political information class. Creativity was of the utmost significance at this school, and the main evaluation criteria were based on talent and humanity. Therefore my pioneer and Komsomol years passed by almost unnoticed. Children from other Ukrainian towns studied at the art school. I can't remember whether there were Jewish children at this school. We took no notice whatsoever of our nationality; that is why I can't remember. I met my best friends at this school. One is Ukrainian and another is Russian. We still see each other every now and then.

I have very dim memories of the period of persecution of the cosmopolites in 1953. There were no discussions or any meetings at school related to this subject. My parents didn't have any discussions of this subject at home either, at least in my presence. But I remember the "doctors' case." My parents talked about it at home. Of course, nobody in our family believed that these doctors were guilty. I think Stalin's death saved many lives. We didn't have any meetings at school when Stalin died. The only thing I remember was a crepe flag on our building. Then I heard that Stalin died. None of us felt any sorrow or grief in this regard.

My parents and my grandmother were happy to hear that Israel was established in 1948. My father often told me about the people who put so much effort into turning a desert into a blooming oasis. We admired them. But we never considered emigration to that country.

My father could draw, and he was happy that I studied at the art school. He began a collection of books on art. He was saving money to buy these books. When he had a day off he always went to bookstores to get a couple of books. We all loved to read. He would always bring me an interesting book, and later, he would always have one for my husband as well. This collection of books that I have is my father's. My mother always, when I was pupil, had to tell me to go to bed in the evening, but I still waited up until everybody else went to sleep to continue my reading.

My grandmother always helped me with my studies at art school. I had to draw many portraits, and my grandmother never refused to pose for me.

My grandmother didn't go to synagogue after the war. She could hardly walk so far. I don't remember her praying at home. My grandmother died in October 1960. It was a big tragedy for me. My grandmother had been with me since I was a baby. It was very hard for me to learn to live my life

without her.

After finishing school in 1953, I wanted to continue my studies in Riga, but my mother convinced me to enter an art institute in Kiev. I had no trouble passing my entrance exams. Sergei Alexeevich Grigoriev, director of the Institute, often came by our school. He knew me and selected me and three other pupils to become students at his institute. Then came the day when they posted the lists of students that were admitted, but my name was not there. About a week after that, Sergei Alexeevich called me and asked me to come immediately. I replied that I wouldn't come, because my name was not on the list. Sergei Alexeevich called me several times and sent messengers to me, but I still didn't go. Then he sent two of my close friends to drag me there if necessary. I went there and he explained that he had to admit two students and that this was the only way for them to get in. He also told me that he had submitted a request to Moscow authorities to approve my admission as an additional student. Their approval was issued in a week's time after our meeting, but I was so hurt that I didn't attend classes for another month.

I met my husband Yuriy Lutskevich at school. He came from Kirovograd where his family lived. I don't remember who his father was, but his mother was a pianist at the town Philharmonic. He had an older sister named Nina. Yuriy and I are the same age, both were born in 1934. Yuriy is not a Jew, but this was of no significance.

In Kirovograd, Yura was acquainted with an artist who became his teacher, and later gave him some money to go to study in Kiev. Yura came to the 10th grade in our school. We met and got married when we were 3rd year students at the Institute. We often went to concerts together. We both loved symphonic music. Also, Yura was very fond of fishing. He took a boat and sailed far away to a lake because there were few lakes in the vicinity. I used to meet him when he was coming back home. Once, I remember, he brought back a backpack full of big pikes. He shared them with his friends and our neighbors.

I was a graduate when our son Alexandr was born. There was too little space in our apartment for all of us. I was assigned to work at school and I received a one-room apartment from this school. Yura also worked. I was raising our son and kept working. We worked at school at first and then at the Art Institute. But soon we quit teaching, as we both took to creative work. The authorities provided us with an art shop and my son spent a lot of his time there when he grew older. Of course, he took to drawing as well. He graduated from the Art school in Kiev and then studied at the Art Institute. He had several exhibitions. He worked in Denmark and then, recently, in London. He painted landscapes and portraits. He often goes on tours. Alexandr speaks fluent English and a little bit of Danish and

German. My son is married to a Jew, and they have a son named Zhenechka who goes to primary school. He is 8 years old. He doesn't want to draw yet. He liked to draw when he was younger, and we have kept some of his paintings from that time.

My parents continued working until they were very old. My father was a barber and my mother was a stenographer. My mother had many students and they have very warm memories of her. My father died in 1982 and my mother died in 1983.

In 2001 my husband died. It was a tragedy for me. I haven't recovered from it yet.

I knew about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, but I never faced any. All the people I knew treated me nicely. Perhaps, because the people in my surroundings consisted of educated and intelligent people, artists and sculptors etc.

I am still working. I have exhibitions. Many of my pictures have been sold abroad. Some of them I gave away as presents. I recently got an offer to work in Germany and then organize an exhibition of my pictures there. I lived there for over two months. I had some of my works with me, and I painted while I lived there. The exhibition was held at the palace where one of the Russian tsars once resided. It was beautiful. Sometimes I go to the house of artists in the outskirts of Moscow where I work for 2 or 3 months of the year. I have many friends there. My work is very important for me. I haven't traveled much. I've only been in Poland and France, but I hope I will have an opportunity to visit other countries.

But now I find time to study Jewish history and religion, as well as Jewish traditions. I get more and more interested in these studies. I visited Israel recently. I liked it there very much. But one can live a life and be creative only where one was born. Many things are possible now thanks to Hesed and the Jewish Community Center. I used to go there with my friend, but her physical condition is worse and she cannot do it any more. I attend lectures and meetings. I have new friends and we often celebrate Jewish holidays. I read Jewish newspapers and magazines. There are so many interesting things around. I feel that by gaining all this knowledge I'm getting closer to my grandmother. She was the first to open this striking world to me.