

# Maya Kaganskaya

Maya Kaganskaya

Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: April 2003

Maya Kaganskaya, an elderly woman with shrewd eyes, gray hair that she wears in a knot, a disciplined and accurate person wearing a business suit, looks like a teacher or a doctor. She lives in a nice two- bedroom apartment with furniture of 1970s style that her husband and she bought back then. There is a Japanese TV in her room that her son gave her as a gift. I guess, this is the only item of 'luxury' that she owns. She also has a piano that she plays. Maya makes the impression of a reticent person at the beginning of our conversation, but when she starts talking her eyes brighten up, especially when she talks about her mother and grandfather. Although she told me a long story of her family she didn't disclose her deep and private feelings or her love to her husband. One can only guess how strong her feelings are towards those that she loves.



[Family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the War](#)

[After the War](#)

[Glossary](#)

## Family background

My maternal and paternal relatives came from Radomyshl, Zhytomyr region [about 120 km west of Kiev]. The majority of the population in Radomyshl was Jewish. There were municipal buildings and a market in the center of the town. Jews also resided in the central part of Radomyshl. Like in all other towns Jews were craftsmen and tradesmen in their majority. There was a big beautiful synagogue and several prayer houses in the town. My ancestors were religious Jews professing Hasidism [1](#) - a wide spread religious movement in Bessarabia [2](#). My maternal great-great-grandparents whose name I don't remember were Hasidim. They lived in Radomyshl and their children, who also became Hasidim, were born in this town.

Their daughter, Chava Shteinberg, my great-grandmother, was born in 1860. She was called 'Chava de husidka' [Chava the Hasid woman] and became a widow when she was young. She had three children. She was under the guardianship of Reizl Gorenshtein, a Jewish woman, a Hasid and the owner of a fabric factory. She contributed to charity and provided meals to poor Hasidim and made arrangements for their children: helped girls getting married and young men getting a job.

Reizl Gorenshtein played an important role in the life of our family. She supported Chava and helped her to raise the children. During the Soviet power Chava lived in Radomyshl with her daughter Basheva. I saw Chava several times when my mother and I traveled to this town. She died in 1937. She looked like everyone else. She wore a long black skirt, a blouse and a kerchief. She remained deeply religious until the end of her life.

My grandmother Riva Vilenskaya, nee Shteinberg, born in 1880, was my great-grandmother's oldest daughter. The next daughter was Basheva, whose last name in marriage was Rabinovich. She was born around 1885. Basheva also became a widow. She had three daughters: Bronia, Raya and Fira. Basheva owned a confectionery shop and was called 'Basheva de szukernitsa' [Basheva the confectioner]. She worked very hard doing men's work. Basheva was also a Hasid, but her daughters who were in their teens during the revolutionary years [the Russian Revolution of 1917] [3](#) were atheists and wanted to get education.

Raya finished Pedagogical College, left for Leningrad and got married there. In the middle of the 1930s Basheva joined her there. Bronia and Fira lived in Kiev. They were both married. Fira's husband was a Jew and Bronia married Nikolay Ermolovich, a Ukrainian man. They moved to the Ural, for the construction of a new town: Komsomolsk-on-Amur. In the late 1930s they returned to Kiev. In 1939 their daughter, Valentina, was born and in late 1940 another daughter was born.

My great-grandmother Chava's younger son, Berko Shteinberg, was born in 1892. He was called Berele in the family and in the Soviet times he became Boris [common name] [4](#); that name was written in all his documents. He finished Medical Faculty of Odessa University before the Revolution of 1917. He became an orthopedist. He lived in Leningrad with his wife, Rosa, and his daughter, Sophia. During the Great Patriotic War [5](#) he worked in a hospital at the front. He died in the early 1960s. Rosa died shortly after he passed away. I have no contact with Sophia.

My grandmother Riva was betrothed to Isroel Vilenski, a young man from a Hasidic family before she turned 17. It was a common practice in Jewish families. Isroel, my grandfather, was only half a year older than Riva. He was born in 1879. His ancestors, in particular his paternal grandmother whose name I don't know, came from a rich family of a merchant of Guild I [6](#).

My great-great grandfather Isroel's son Moshe, my great-grandfather, was a well-educated Hasid. He read many books and could interpret the Torah and the Talmud, but he was no good in everyday life issues. He didn't learn a craft or profession. They lived in the town of Brusilov near Radomyshl [100 km from Kiev]. Moshe was married three times. He divorced his first wife; I don't know for what reason or how he managed to get a divorce when a divorce was strictly forbidden. His second wife died and the third one was my great-grandmother Manita. By that time they had spent what they received from Moshe's mother and Moshe had to earn his living and provide for the family. Moshe became a melamed, a Jewish teacher. He taught Jewish children in various towns. He was paid little for his work and his family was poor. Moshe and his third wife had two children: my grandfather Isroel and his sister Beshyva. My grandfather Isroel studied at cheder like all Jewish boys. He was a smart boy, but his family couldn't pay for his education. I didn't know my great-grandparents. Moshe died about 1910 and Manita ran away from home trying to escape from a pogrom [7](#) in 1919, vanished and never returned home. She was probably killed.

My grandfather's older sister Beshyva, born in 1875, married Aron Geller, one of the ancestors to the 6th generation of famous Israel Besht [Baal Shem Tov] [8](#), the founder of Hasidism, a just man

and a miracle worker. Aron Gellers' father was a senior man at the synagogue in Khotin, chairman of the Jewish community and a well-respected man. They were very poor and decided to arrange for their sons to marry girls with a profession. Beshyva, who grew up in a poor family learned to sew at the age of ten and when she grew up she became a skilled dressmaker for poor Jews. Aron was neither smart - although he descended from a wise man - nor could he earn his living. They lived in Beshyva parents' house in Brusilov. They had two children: a son named Israel, born in 1910, and a girl, whose name I don't remember, born in 1913. In 1919 Beshyva's husband Aron died of typhoid. His six- year-old daughter passed away shortly afterwards. Beshyva was raising her son. Her son, Israel, studied in cheder. I don't know where he studied in Brusilov. In the middle of the 1920s Israel and Beshyva moved to Kiev. Israel went to the 7th grade then. After he finished school he worked as a laborer and loader, then he finished a rabfak [9](#) and an agricultural college. In due time he became an outstanding scientist, agronomist, soil specialist, and an expert in growing sugar beets. Beshyva lived with her son's family in Kiev. She died at the age of 102.

My grandfather Isroel and my grandmother Riva got married after a four- year engagement at the beginning of 1900. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at the synagogue. The guardian of my great-grandmother, Reizl Gorenshtein, paid all wedding expenses, bought a gown and wedding gifts. She also employed Isroel at her fabric factory. First he worked as a spinner and then, after some training, he became a supervisor at the factory. He received an apartment from the factory. My grandparents had six children. Although my grandfather had a stable job and a house they weren't very wealthy and couldn't afford to give education to all children. Therefore, only my mother, Basia Vilenskaya, the oldest, got education before the Revolution of 1917. My mother's parents were religious: they observed all traditions and celebrated holidays and Sabbath. They went to the synagogue. I don't remember these details; it's what my mother told me.

My mother had two sisters and three brothers: Ania, her Jewish name was Hana, was born in 1902, Feigl, followed in 1906 and Nochim in 1908. Odl, born in 1910, died from a brain disease in infancy. Moshe, the youngest, was born in 1912. The boys studied at cheder and then at a Jewish primary school. The girls also studied at the Jewish primary school.

My mother's sister Ania got fond of revolutionary ideas and joined the Red Army in 1919. At that time she also joined the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks. In Kiev she entered a Party school and became a history teacher. She met Leonid Paliy, a Ukrainian man, at this school. They fell in love with each other and decided to get married. Knowing that her parents would be against their marriage Ania decided to tell them that Leonid was a Jew, especially since he had dark hair and dark eyes. She taught him several questions that are usually asked in Jewish families during introductions and he learned the answers in Yiddish. Finally they came to meet Ania's parents. Leonid answered the first questions in Yiddish with dignity, but he couldn't go on talking Yiddish. My great-grandmother said, 'Weizmir! [My God!], young people cannot speak Yiddish any more!'. She believed her daughter's tale and gave her consent to their marriage. They had a civil ceremony at a registry office.

Ania and Leonid lived a few happy years in Zvenigorodka near Uman where Leonid was the director of the technical school. In 1926 their son, Stalia, named after Stalin, was born. In summer 1933 Ania and Leonid went to a farm where other organizations and schools sent their employees and students to work. Ania and Leonid met a young teacher of history, a Jewish woman, that they enjoyed spending time with. After some time Leonid told Ania that he had an affair with that

woman. Ania left the same day. She came to Uman with her son. This was a hard period in 1933 [during the famine in Ukraine] [10](#), and Ania had no money or bread cards - she didn't take anything with her from Zvenigorodka. Being a party activist, she was admitted to the Institute of Socialist Education in Uman. She also worked as a teacher in social disciplines to earn her living. Leonid married that woman later, but he asked Ania to forgive him. She didn't, but they remained friends for a lifetime. Later they entered Pedagogical College in Kiev. They prepared for exams together.

After finishing college Ania worked as the director of a school in Kiev, and when vehicle maintenance companies were opened she went to work as an editor with the newspaper of the political department of a vehicle maintenance company. In 1937 [during the Great Terror] [11](#), when her brother, Uncle Nochim, was arrested, she was expelled from the Party and moved to Vasilkov [a small town near Kiev]. Soon she resumed her membership in the Party and worked as the director of a school until the Great Patriotic War.

My mother's second sister, Feiga, was the 'black sheep' of the family, as they say. She didn't work and liked parties and drinking. People even said that she was hardly selective in her relationships with men. Sometime in 1925 she went swimming with a group of her companions and never returned. They said Feiga was drunk and drowned in the river.

My mother's younger brother, Nochim, was under the influence of Ania's communist views. He became a pioneer, a Komsomol [12](#) member and then joined the Communist party. He finished some short-term training and studied at Promaspirantura, an educational institution for party activists. In the 1930s Nochim was head of the party office of a knitwear factory in Kiev. In 1936, during the time of arrests [Great Terror], he was accused in cooperation with the Zinoviev-Kamenev block [Zinoviev-Kamenev triumvirate] [13](#). When the so-called platform of Trotsky [14](#) appeared in 1928-29 the Party split into two groups. One group didn't support Trotsky and the other group, including Nochim, offered to give Trotsky supporters an opportunity to express their views. This served as the basis of Nochim's charges in 1936.

Nochim also suffered for the reason that the director of the factory where he worked gave him a recommendation to join the Party and this director was executed as an 'enemy of the people'. My uncle was also accused of being 'enemy of the people' and expelled from the Party. He was fired from work. He went to work as a worker at a plant. However, such injustice made him feel restless and he went to an NKVD [15](#) office to prove he wasn't guilty. He didn't return from there. He was sent into exile to Komi ASSR where he worked at a woodcutting facility. Since his charges weren't that severe he was subject to amnesty at the beginning of 1940 after the heads of the security agencies had been replaced. Beriia [16](#) replaced Yezhov [17](#), who was arrested and executed. Many prisoners were released under the pretext that Yezhov was an 'enemy of the people' and imprisoned innocent people. Nochim returned in 1940. He wasn't allowed residence in Kiev or other capitals of the Union Republics. Nochim, his wife and their daughter Nelia - born in 1936, after Nochim was imprisoned, so she didn't even know her father - moved to Malin, Zhythomyr region.

Uncle Moshe, the youngest in my mother's family, named after my great-grandfather, finished a mining technical school during the Soviet regime and worked in quarries and coalmines in Donetsk, Ukraine.

My mother Basia, the oldest in the family, was born in 1900. Her parents gave her education: she finished a grammar school for girls in Zhythomyr, and a private music school where she learned to

play the piano. My mother studied and lived in Zythomyr, 50 kilometers from her home village of Radomyshl. She had to rent an apartment. Her family sacrificed themselves to give her education: they paid for her studies in grammar school and apartment rental fees. After finishing grammar school my mother went to Kiev. She wanted to enter the Conservatory since she was very good at singing. This happened in 1917. She failed to enter the Conservatory and returned to Radomyshl.

Then the Revolution took place, followed by the Civil War [18](#), and there were other things than studies to think about. My mother was sufficiently educated. She began to work as a teacher and then as the director of a children's home, the so-called 'House of Teenagers', although she wasn't much older than her pupils. In 1920 she followed into her older sister Ania's footsteps and joined the Party. In 1921 or 1922 she was cleaned 'out' [Editor's note: At certain intervals, all party members were checked by party committees to identify and get rid of 'untrustworthy' party members.]. The thing is that my mother was courted by a communist who was the commander of a partisan unit. My mother didn't respond to his passes since she had already met with my father, who was a bourgeois offspring. That communist submitted his report to the Party committee. He wrote that my mother was seeing a man of non-proletariat origin. My mother was expelled. Of course, in those years she was far from religion or Jewish traditions: she considered herself an advanced person that had no prejudices.

I know very little about my father's family. I knew my paternal great- grandfather, Gershl Radomyshlski, who was a clerk before the Revolution of 1917. He died in 1940 at the age of 102. My paternal grandfather, Meyer Kaganski, born in the 1870s, worked for his older brother, Moshe, who was a leather specialist and became rich during the Civil War. During the Civil War a gang [19](#) of a White Guards [20](#) officer came into town. My grandfather Meyer, a handsome tall man with a big dark beard, was the first they met on their way. The bandits brutally murdered him. My grandmother Pesia had to raise her three children on her own: her daughter, Malka, my father, Yakov, and her younger son, Omo. This incident happened in 1918 or 1919. I know little about Grandmother Pesia. I know that after her husband perished she tried to move to America with her younger son, Omo, but he didn't receive a medical certificate due to some health problems and they stayed in Radomyshl. I saw her once in 1940 when she visited my mother. My grandmother was very religious. She wore a kerchief, celebrated all Jewish holidays and Sabbath, observed Jewish traditions and followed the kashrut. She died after the war, sometime in 1946.

My father's sister, Malka, born in 1900, married Semyon Katsovski, a Jewish man. In 1923 her son was born and shortly afterwards she moved to Tashkent [Uzbekistan] with her husband and son looking for a job. A few years later Malka developed symptoms of mental illness and after a few years she got into a mental hospital in Lubertsy, Moscow region, where they lived. Semyon waited for her several years. When the Great Patriotic War began he left for somewhere and there was no contact with him. There's no information about Malka, either. She probably died during the Great Patriotic War.

My father's younger brother, Omo, lived in Moscow. He was a cab driver. He had a Russian wife. He died in 1955. That's all I know about him. We weren't in contact.

My father, Yakov Kaganski, was born in Radomyshl in 1903. After my grandfather died in 1919 my uncle Moshe employed my father. Around 1920 my uncle moved to Palestine. My father finished cheder and didn't study for a long time afterwards. In the 1920s my father finished a vocational



school; I don't know what kind of school this was. At the time when he met my mother he didn't have a job. However, people knew that Uncle Moshe was a wealthy man and my father was also considered to belong to the rich. That was the reason why my mother was expelled from the Party, as I said earlier.

My parents got married in 1922. Although their families were religious, especially my mother's family, my father and mother were atheists. They just had a civil ceremony in a registry office. They lived in the house of my father's parents with Grandmother Pesia after their wedding.

In 1924 my parents moved to Kiev. I think they moved looking for a better life and more job opportunities. Grandmother Pesia bought an apartment for them: two small rooms and a little kitchen in a basement in Podol [21](#). I don't know where my grandmother got the money to buy an apartment - she probably had some savings. My mother's parents, Grandmother Riva and Grandfather Isroel, lived in Brusilov where they moved to in the early 1920s. All relatives that were moving to Kiev from small towns - Nochim, Bronia and many others - stayed in our small apartment. My mother told me that they stayed with us several days until they found some accommodation. They slept on the floor. We had two rooms in a communal apartment [22](#) and there was another family besides us. We had kerosene lamps to light the rooms, fetched water from a pump in the yard, and washed ourselves in a bowl in the kitchen. There was a toilet in the yard and there was a line to get there in the morning.

Before I was born my mother had an abdominal pregnancy and when I was born my parents understood that I was their first and last child. I was born on 16th May 1926. My father called me Maya.

## Growing up

There was huge unemployment in our country. My mother worked at the tin food plant and confectionery for some time. My father worked for a leather craftsman and after the liquidation of the NEP [23](#) he couldn't find a job for a long time. In 1928 he decided to move to Tashkent hoping to find a job there. His sister, Malka, and her family and his mother lived there. My mother refused to follow him. She wanted to stay close to her parents, who often came to see her in Kiev. Finally my father left for Tashkent in 1928. At the beginning he came to see us once a year. He missed us and asked my mother to join him there. He said there weren't so many problems with getting a job there, but my mother was stubborn and didn't want to go. My father began to visit us less often and in 1939 he married a Russian woman and moved to Yoshkar-Ola.

After my father left, my mother went to study at a pedagogical school for a year. She sent me to her parents in Brusilov for a year. After finishing pedagogical school in 1930 my mother went to work at the Jewish elementary school in Brusilov. My grandparents moved into our apartment in Kiev; they sold the house in Brusilov. They probably hoped that life would be easier in the city. My mother and I lived in a small room at the school in Brusilov. There were only 35 pupils at school, the director and one teacher: my mother. Pupils of the 1st and 3rd grades studied in the first shift and pupils of the 2nd and 4th grades in the second one. Although I was only four years old, I stayed in class and listened to the teacher. I was an industrious pupil and soon learned to write in Yiddish. The curriculum in this school was no different from other schools; we studied mathematics, drawing and botanics. I believed myself to be a pupil and demanded to have my last name on the list of pupils and my documents in the files. My mother even had to file my birth certificate. Townspeople

even called it 'five-year plan [24](#) in four years'. This was one of the widespread slogans during the execution of the first five-year plan and I was four years old. This nickname meant 'fulfillment of the five-year plan in four years'.

My mother and I returned to Kiev in 1932 and she went to work at a Jewish school near our house in Podol. I was six years old, but I had finished four years at school already and could read and write in Ukrainian and Yiddish. It didn't make sense to send me to kindergarten and my mother obtained a special permission for me to go to the 1st grade since I was still under age to go to school. There were several categories of the first grade: 1st grade literate, 1st grade illiterate and 1st grade average. Pupils of the 1st literate had already finished a 'zero' class or came from kindergartens where they were taught the basics. 1st average was a mixture and 1st illiterate was a class for illiterate children. It goes without saying that I went to the 1st grade literate. My mother was a teacher in the 1st grade illiterate. I stayed in my class until I got bored. Then I asked my teacher permission to go out and went to my mother's class. I stayed there a little and then went back to my class. I was very successful at school and when I was out of class and our teacher asked a difficult question my classmates replied, 'When Musia -that's how they called me affectionately - comes back she will answer this'.

Grandfather Isroel and grandmother Riva lived with us in Kiev. My grandfather worked in the Metalloprom factory which manufactured metal ware. My grandfather made some units and later he went to work as a janitor at school. I spent much time with my grandparents. They talked Yiddish to one another and to my mother, but they tried to communicate in Russian with me. My mother believed that since Yiddish was my mother tongue I was good at it anyway while I needed to study Russian to do well in the future since it was the language of teaching in higher educational institutions.

My grandmother laughed at my Yiddish. I tried to speak it the way we were taught at school while my grandmother spoke a local dialect and she told me that the Yiddish I spoke was more like non-Jews imitating Jews speaking Yiddish. My grandfather had a very good Jewish education and knew the Torah and the Talmud well. I was their favorite granddaughter. My grandfather loved me because I actually grew up without a father. My grandfather spent a lot of time with me. He told me things from the Old Testament like fairy tales.

I remember how my grandparents celebrated Saturday: My grandmother put on her kerchief and lit the candles. She didn't do any work on Saturday while grandfather had to go to work. I don't think he was very religious in those years. I think he probably observed traditions and celebrated holidays paying tribute to tradition or trying to please my grandmother. He only wore a kippah and tallit during the prayers on holidays. I don't remember him going to the synagogue. My grandmother was very religious and constantly had a prayer book with her. She went to the synagogue every day as long as she could move. I remember the celebration of Pesach. My grandparents made matzah in the Russian stove and I pressed out holes. Their acquaintances - an old Jewish couple, visited them at Pesach. My grandfather conducted the seder and I asked him the four traditional questions [the mah nishtanah]. I remember only one of them, 'Why do we eat bread and matzah all year round, but only matzah today?' My grandfather answered all the questions.

I don't think we followed the kashrut at home. We didn't eat pork, but every now and then we bought sausage. There were no stores selling kosher food. My grandparents didn't impose their

religious convictions on me. They thought I had to find out by myself and live my own life. When I was eight or nine years old the persecution of religion [struggle against religion] [25](#) began. There was anti-religious propaganda everywhere. I became a pioneer and was supposed to be an atheist, apikoyres in Yiddish. Under the influence of the propaganda I began to develop doubts about religious principles. I thought for a long time about how I should demonstrate my atheism and finally I went to bed during the seder. By the time when I was supposed to ask questions I was no longer at the table. My grandmother didn't make any comments about it to me.

I was an active pioneer and took part in many activities. I attended all kinds of clubs: choir, drama club and played checkers. I also studied to play the piano at a state music school. We studied music, literature and solfeggio at school. I can't say I was fond of studying music. I preferred taking part in various events at school: I recited poems, sang songs at school concerts and took part in parades and subbotniks [26](#). I wrote poems and attended a literature club with the Jewish newspaper 'Zai Grei' - 'Be ready!' [the motto of pioneers]. I wrote poems in Russian and Yiddish.

I remember the famine in 1932-33. My mother had food coupons and received food in a store for workers. A nephew of my grandfather sent some money from America. It was only enough to buy some flour and a piece of very delicious herring at the Torgsin [27](#) store. Basically, our family didn't suffer much during the famine, but it may be just my impression since I got the best pieces of food in the family.

A doctor lived with us in our apartment When Uncle Nochim was arrested this doctor spoke about it at school, but the reaction of my mother's colleagues was different from what she had expected. They didn't blame my mother as his relative, but discussed what my mother should do to avoid any after-effects of this event. They decided that my mother should disappear from Kiev for the time being. My mother went to see my father. She realized that she was wrong having terminated relationships with him and wanted to make it up. They met in Kazan, but nothing worked out the way she expected. I stayed in Kiev. In some time my mother returned and went to work in a Russian school.

In 1938 our school merged with Jewish school #17, and in 1939 it became a Russian school. The only change incorporated was switching to Russian as the language of teaching. In 1941 my classmates joined the Komsomol; I had to wait until I reached the age of 16. After I finished the 9th grade the war began. By that time my mother and I lived in another apartment in a house in Malopodvalnaya Street that the cooperative company of my mother's brother Moshe had built.

## During the War

A few of the best pupils and I were invited to the prom in our school on 20th June. After the prom we went for a walk in the town. On the next day we went to the railway station with a friend of ours that was leaving for Kovel [a town near the border with Poland] where her sister and her sister's husband lived. It turned out that all trains going in Western direction were cancelled. On our way back we noticed the scarlet sunset. The sky was like on fire. In the morning of 22nd June my mother and I heard some distant bursting sound, but we ignored IT. At about 9 o'clock I went to my music class in Podol. When I was on my way I heard the sound of sirens and I stayed a few minutes in an entrance to a house thinking that this was a training alarm requiring people to stay inside. For some reason the tram to Podol didn't commute. People waiting at a stop discussed what the reason might be. I walked on. One house in Podol was ruined by a bomb, but there was still no word about



the war. I attended my class and then went to see a friend of mine who lived in Podol. It was early afternoon. A bright and sunny morning turned into a dull and gloomy afternoon. I met my friend walking with her friends. They told me about Molotov's [28](#) speech and about the war. We didn't feel scared since we were kids and couldn't imagine what a war was like.

Every day we had classes of civil defense at school. Every day I went to school in Podol with my gas mask on. In about ten days all boys from our and senior classes were sent to Donetsk for military reserve. We said goodbye to them wearing our fancy dresses and wrote poems for them. Almost all of them perished in Donetsk or at the front.

Our family didn't have any doubts about evacuation. We watched films about the brutality of fascists, such as Professor Mamlock [29](#) and others, and were aware of Hitler's plans about Jews. In early July our family began preparations for evacuation. Uncle Moshe was appointed director of a mine in Lugansk [about 1,500 km from Kiev in the southeast of Ukraine]. My family thought it was far enough in the rear and decided to send me there with his family. Uncle Moshe only had space for one person in the car. My mother said that she would stay in Kiev and if Germans invaded it she would join the underground movement and that she would feel better if I went with my uncle. We left on 3rd July, but we weren't allowed to leave Kiev since all roads were closed and civil vehicles weren't allowed to leave. We returned home. There was panic in Kiev and people tried to find any way to leave. Trains were overcrowded. Many people went by boats or barges down the Dnieper, which was continuously being bombed.

My grandfather and my uncles Nochim and Moshe found a way out. They bought a cart and two horses and made a booth on the cart so it looked like a gypsy wagon. When we all boarded this wagon: my mother and I, my grandfather, Uncle Nochim and his wife and daughter and Uncle Moshe with his family - the horses could hardly pull the wagon. When we had to ascend a street in Podol the wagon fell apart and we had to return home. The men started working on our means of transportation and we started on our way again on 15th July. In the evening we reached the town of Borispol, 30 kilometers from Kiev. There was a military airfield in this town. We stayed overnight there watching our horses at night. I took my turn when it was my time to watch them. In the morning we moved on. After we covered about ten kilometers some military took away one horse from us - this happened near Baryshevka. They gave us a letter confirming that it was their obligation to return it to us after the war.

We had to separate: Uncle Moshe, his family and my grandfather and grandmother boarded a train in the direction of Lugansk. Later they reached Fergana in Uzbekistan. Uncle Nochim, his family, my mother and I started on our way. We covered another 30 kilometers before some other military confiscated the remaining horse. We had to think of an alternative. Uncle Nochim had a permission enabling him and his family to take any train. We boarded the first transit train transporting damaged tanks. There were only those tanks and our family on the train. We reached Poltava [regional town in Ukraine, 250 km east of Kiev] where we changed for a train with refugees. This was a freight train. We reached Kharkov [regional town in Ukraine, 550 km east of Kiev] and from there we moved on to Stalingrad. In Kharkov we met a family from Vasilkov. Their daughter was the same age as I. There was another Jewish family from Bessarabia. I met a Ukrainian boy, Mykhailo. He sang Ukrainian songs beautifully. He and I sang Ukrainian songs, Russian ballads, popular Soviet songs and I also sang Jewish songs. I enjoyed it and was sad at the same time. I didn't even notice the discomforts caused by evacuation and wartime; lack of food and water. I

believed that everything would be fine. We reached Stalingrad in a relatively short time: 18 days.

We stayed in Stalingrad for several hours before we boarded another train that took us to a fish farm kolkhoz [30](#) on the Volga in the villages of Bolshoy Tuzuklei and Maly Tuzuklei, Stalingrad region. It was almost 2,000 kilometers from home. The management of the kolkhoz was notified that there was a train to arrive. There was a ceremonious meeting: the local leadership and farmers were waiting for us in the central square near the village council. Farmers offered us accommodation in their houses. The director of the local primary school offered us to stay in his house: he wanted to have a family of a teacher to stay with them. There was a clay hut in his yard that he offered to us. He gave us a big samovar and showed a pile of corns to be used to stoke a stove.

So we were in evacuation. My mother and I, Uncle Nochim and his wife went to work in a vegetable crew in the kolkhoz. This was early August and we picked cucumbers, tomatoes, melons and huge water melons. At the beginning of the war we received enough bread: one kilo for a working person and 600 grams for a dependant. There was enough fruit and vegetables and I gained weight and got sun-tanned in a few weeks.

Uncle Nochim continuously went to see a military commissar with his requests to be sent to the front. He remained fanatically devoted to the Soviet power and believed everything that happened to him to be an unfortunate misunderstanding and mistake. Since he was under arrest he wasn't fully trusted to be sent to the front, but in the middle of 1942 Nochim went to the front. He perished at the beginning of 1945 in battles on the Oder [during the Battle for Berlin, which lasted from January-May 1945]. His wife passed away and his daughter lives in Kiev.

When the Great Patriotic War was began my mother's sister Ania evacuated to Poltava region. Then she came to Stalingrad region at the beginning of fall 1941. Ania became the director of a school and invited my mother to work as a teacher there. We didn't know anything about the living conditions in the village where Ania was working and the family council decided that I would stay to finish school and receive my certificate of secondary education and my mother would go there. In October or November my mother wrote me a letter telling me to come to that village. It was already very cold when I finally decided to go. I came to Astrakhan, but I couldn't move on since the Volga was frozen and there was no boat transportation. I had to go back to the kolkhoz. On the way I got my feet frost-bitten. When I arrived Uncle Nochim, who loved me dearly, massaged my feet for hours in the evenings and wrapped me in a blanket. Nochim was a very sociable man. He was always among people. I stayed in the kolkhoz throughout the winter. I drove an ox-drawn cart and sorted out potatoes and vegetables. In spring I worked at the crew of Komsomol members that constructed storage facilities for rice. It was hard work. We had to carry a lot of soil to and fro. Our meals weren't very nutritious. We mostly had fish that we even hated the sight of. Sometimes we got transportation on ox-drawn carts and sometimes we had to walk ten kilometers to and from work. I worked in this crew through spring 1942.

My mother was very nervous about my being away from her. She always had nervous breakdowns: she was afraid that we would never see each other again. In early summer she managed to get to Stalingrad and from there to the kolkhoz. She walked some distance and got a ride on a cart where she left her bag with her belongings and all documents. She was probably very nervous and overstressed thinking about me.

In summer 1942, when the front was approaching Stalingrad, we decided to go to Middle Asia since my uncle Moshe and his family, Grandmother Riva and Grandfather Isroel were there, in Fergana, Uzbekistan.

My mother and I arrived in Fergana in late summer 1942. Uncle Moshe, who was a mining inspector, received a nice apartment in Fergana, had a good salary and got food packages. They were doing well. Only my grandmother, who fell ill on the way, didn't recover. Before she had to stay in bed due to her illness she had a job: she knitted gloves for the front. She had to accept this job to get a food card. When I came I began doing this work. In Fergana I went to the 10th grade at a local school. I didn't really enjoy studying there: it was boring and too routinely. Schoolchildren were sent to the construction of a water channel for a month. We excavated stony soil and carried pallets with soil. My mother couldn't find a job as a teacher and was a receptionist at a store of salvageable materials.

In early fall 1942 Aunt Ania arrived. A few days later my grandmother died. I continuously touched her feet hoping that they were warm and she was alive although I was scared dead of dead people before. I was so much in grief that my mother sent me away from home. My cousin Stalia told me later that grandmother was taken out of the house on some stretchers and she was buried in this same position in an Uzbek cemetery. Her grave was back-filled with stones. My grandfather kept reciting memorial prayers.

After the funeral we went to the town of Kyzyl-Kiya where aunt Ania was offered a job. This town was 35 kilometers from Fergana, but it was in Kyrgyzstan. I tried to enter an institute in Fergana. I could have gone to medical or pedagogical colleges after the 9th grade, but I didn't want to study there. I wanted to go to the Institute of Oriental Studies, but I wasn't admitted there since I didn't have a higher secondary education and wasn't a Komsomol member. When in Kiev I didn't join the Komsomol and later I somehow missed to do so, too. I was busy with other things.

There was an iron mine and the Mining College in Kyzyl-Kiya. My mother got a job at the school in a kolkhoz four kilometers from the town. Stalia and I entered the Mining College, where admission was allowed on the basis of lower secondary education. We lived in the hostel of the college. I lived with five other girls evacuated from various towns of the Soviet Union. We shared everything we had and got along well. I want to say that I've never faced any anti-Semitism in my life. I never cared about anyone's nationality and people always treated me well.

I studied at the Electric Engineering Faculty where I was the only girl. We worked in a mine for the most part where we did all kinds of auxiliary work. I studied very well although I had never been interested in the mining business before. I joined the Komsomol and obtained my Komsomol membership card.

When Kiev was liberated in fall 1943 my mother and Aunt Ania submitted their request to obtain permission for re-evacuation. They left in March 1944 and Stalia and I stayed. Firstly, we had to finish college and secondly, students weren't allowed to return to the areas that had been liberated recently. My mother, Aunt Ania and my grandfather lived in Vasilkov district, Kiev region. My father, who was wounded at the front and had to go to hospital, demobilized and came to see me. We had a warm meeting. I forgave him for everything. I understood that he had to live his own life and needed a woman beside him. My father was trying to convince me to go to Yoshkar-Ola where he lived with his Russian wife Alla. I didn't like my profession anyway. Although I was about to get my

diploma I quit college and went to Yoshkar-Ola. I stayed with my father for over a month. My father's wife Alla treated me well. They had three sons. They lived in a small two-bedroom apartment in the center of the town. My father didn't go to work since he wasn't feeling well after he was wounded. Alla looked after him and the sons.

I went to my mother, who lived with my aunt and grandfather in the village of Plesetskoye, Vasilkov district, 40 kilometers from Kiev. Aunt Ania was the director of a school and leader of the party unit of the village. They lived in a nice house and had a kitchen garden. By the time I arrived in November 1944 they had a good harvest of potatoes and vegetables. Ania didn't remarry. Her son finished Pedagogical College in Uman, where his father worked, after the war and then he finished Pedagogical College in Kiev. He became the director of a boarding school in Vasilkov. Ania died in 1985 and her son, Stalia, died in 1993. He was single.

When we returned we learned about what had happened to our relatives. When the Great Patriotic War began my grandmother Chava's niece Bronia, her husband and children failed to evacuate. She 'followed the order' - Kiev residents used this phrase when speaking about Jews that went to Babi Yar [31](#) - on 29th September 1941 and perished there. When she was leaving her husband took away their older child, Valentina. Bronia had their still breastfeeding baby with her when she left. Valentina's father was hiding the girl throughout the war. Bronia and her baby perished in Babi Yar. Her sisters were in evacuation: Raya, who was the director of a children's home in Leningrad during the blockade [32](#) escorted the evacuation of the children via the 'Road of Life' [33](#) to Omsk where she stayed during the war. Her sister, Basheva, was with her. Fira was in Middle Asia. Their husbands perished at the front. Fira's child died in evacuation. Raya didn't have children. When she returned to Leningrad from evacuation she adopted her niece, Valentina, Bronia's daughter. Fira also moved to her sister in Leningrad. Basheva lived with them. They raised Valentina. Raya became an honored teacher, deputy of the Town Council of Leningrad and a member of the Communist Party. Fira worked as an accountant. Basheva died in the early 1950s, Fira in the 1970s and Raya in the 1980s. Valentina finished a college and became an engineer. She was married, but divorced her husband. She had a son that she raised on her own. Valentina moved to Israel in the 1990s. She has a difficult life there. She cannot prove that she suffered from the Holocaust and stayed on occupied territory since her father, Nikolai Ermolovich, has died long ago and she has no proof of what happened to her.

My mother's youngest brother Moshe was in evacuation in Fergana, Middle Asia, where he worked as mining engineer during the war. After the war he returned to Kiev and worked in design institutes. Moshe died in 1987. His children, Chava and Vladik, live in Israel and his other daughter, Maya, lives in Kiev.

## After the War

In 1944 I went to a school in Motovilovka since there was no higher secondary school in the village and I needed to complete my secondary education. I went to school after New Year's, but I finished it with a gold medal [highest award for school graduates in the USSR]. It was a surprise for us since this was already during the time of anti-Semitism on the state level and some teachers told my mother that the school wouldn't award a medal to me due to my Jewish nationality. We didn't know whether I would get it until the last minute when I was awarded the medal at the prom. In those years medal awardees were admitted to higher educational institutions without exams. I liked

humanitarian subjects and chemistry.

My aunt Ania and I went to Kiev to submit my documents. We went to see the dean of the Faculty of Chemistry of Kiev State University and he told us that he would be happy to admit me, but I submitted my documents to the Philological Faculty. I went back to the village to wait for the confirmation of my admission.

At that time David, my former co-student from the Mining College, found me in the village. He entered Dnepropetrovsk Mining College. David was ten years older than I. Before the war he lived in Western Ukraine. His family perished during the Holocaust. David was in love with me and came to propose to me. He was a good friend to me but there was nothing else. I refused to marry him. David convinced me that I should study some technical disciplines rather than philology. I went to Kiev and picked up my documents at the Philology Faculty. Although they were already stamped with the 'admitted' stamp, I submitted them to the Faculty of Chemistry at the Polytechnic College. During the first semester I understood that I had made the wrong decision. I mean, I studied well, but I took no interest in technical subjects.

I rented a room from Uncle Nochim's wife's friend. There were four tenants in this ten square meter room. Ania, the owner of the apartment, worked as a shop assistant at the knitwear factory. There was a card system and Ania brought all cards she received during a day home and we sorted them out and glued them to report sheets. She had to submit this report at work, but didn't have enough time to finish it at work. I didn't have a space or time to study. My former school tutor found me. She was terrified to see my living conditions and moved me to her apartment. She lived in a small room at school with her husband. I stayed with them for over a month.

Every week I went to Plesetskoye by bus to take some food from home. Once I caught a cold on my way. Pickpockets stole my Trade Union and Komsomol membership cards and some change. I had furunculosis for about two months. When I got better I decided that it was a sign. I took my documents from Polytechnic College and the next year I entered the Faculty of Philology of Kiev University.

When I was a 2nd-year student I switched to the new Faculty of Logic and Psychology of the Russian language and literature. I got a room in the hostel where I lived with three other girls from Kiev region. When we were 4th-year students the management of the faculty announced that we would specialize in the logic and psychology of the Ukrainian language. At first we were taken aback and didn't know what to do. We hardly knew any Ukrainian and our group began to protest. We decided to write a letter of protest to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. One girl said that her father worked at the department of ideology in the Central Committee and she would help to have it processed promptly. I refused to sign this letter since I thought it made no sense to write it and, secondly, Ukrainian teachers were also needed and in provincial schools teachers often taught both languages. A few days later a reaction to this letter arrived. Representatives of the party unit of the university and the Central Committee came to a meeting with our group. All those that signed the letter were accused of chauvinism. Fortunately, there were no serious consequences, but my co-students were discussed at Komsomol meetings for a long time afterward.

This happened in 1950. I got married that year. I married my distant relative, Israel Geller, a son of my grandfather's sister Beshyva. He was 16 years older than I. Israel defended his candidate of



sciences thesis in biology before the war. He lived in a civil marriage before the war. They weren't happy together and when Israel was recruited to the army during the Great Patriotic War they made an agreement that if he survived they would split up. After the war Israel returned to Kiev. His ex-wife got married and lived in Sverdlovsk. When I was a child Israel and his wife were my idols. I just adored Israel. Therefore, when he began to court me and then proposed to me I gave my consent at once. His mother Beshyva and he had a room in a communal apartment in the center of Kiev where I moved to. Our co-tenants were a very nice Ukrainian family. Their only son perished at the front. We were friends and often had tea in the kitchen until late in the evening. In 1960 our co-tenants received an apartment and we became the owners of a three-bedroom apartment with a kitchen. We didn't have a wedding party. We had a civil ceremony and went to visit my mother at the weekend. She made a wedding dinner for relatives. Israel worked at the Sugar Beet Institute. He was a senior scientific worker and then became the head of the laboratory.

I passed my state exams in 1951 - I was already in the family way - and was waiting for an assignment distribution [mandatory job assignment] [34](#). This was the first time I faced state anti-Semitism. I was the only contender for post-graduate studies, but my degree tutor said to me, 'Maya, take it easy. Take it as it is. Jews are not being admitted to the post-graduate course'. During the campaign against cosmopolitans [35](#) there were continuous meetings at which Jews were accused of cosmopolitanism. We had a wonderful teacher of Russian literature - her last name was Fradkina and she was a Jew. She was accused that in her dissertation entitled 'Chekhov [36](#) and English literature' she stated that Chekhov must have been under the influence of the English literature and followed its principles. Everybody understood how wild such an assumption was, but nobody could do anything since anyone would have been fired as a supporter of Zionism if they had tried to speak in her defense. She was fired from university and so was her husband, who taught history.

All Jewish students were expelled from the Faculty of Journalism. So I wasn't surprised or upset about not having a chance to study at the post-graduate course. I was glad I finished my studies. I received a degree with a notice that I had to find a job by myself. I didn't get a mandatory assignment since my husband was a candidate of science and I had to be where he had his job. Besides, my first baby was to be due soon. When a commission was signing my degree the dean said with a jeer, 'You'll stay at home and make borsch', hinting that I wouldn't get a job. My teachers calmed me down telling me that I was smart and wouldn't stay without a job. My older son, Michael, was born in 1951. In 1953 I registered my name in the town department of public education for getting a job. At that time a new wave of anti-Semitism and the Doctors' Plot [37](#) began. As soon as they heard a Jewish name the officials' attitude changed drastically. A job for me was out of the question. They said that if I were a Russian teacher they would give me a job, but a Jew couldn't be a Ukrainian teacher.

Stalin's death in 1953 was hard for me to bear. I cried after him like all other people. It didn't even occur to me that he was to blame for all our problems. My second son, Vitali, was born in 1954. Only in 1956, after the denunciation of Stalin's cult at the Twentieth Party Congress [38](#) open anti-Semitism diminished and I got a job. I was the teacher of a group of children that stayed at school after classes to do their homework, school #157. In some time I got a job at an evening school for young working people. I taught Russian and Ukrainian literature at this school until I retired.

My husband defended his dissertation in 1963. He was head of laboratory and a well-known scientist in the field of soil science. His works were known abroad, but he wasn't allowed to travel abroad. He got invitations to conferences in the USA and Australia, but he always turned them down. He wasn't ambitious and knew that even if he was allowed to go there, which was hardly likely because Jews weren't allowed to go abroad, he would be called to the authorities that would ask him questions and bother him with humiliating and groundless suspicions.

My husband worked a lot and didn't even want to go on vacation. However, we went to resorts in the Crimea several times. Usually I traveled with our children. We had many friends and went to the theater, symphonic concerts, took our children to museums and tried to help develop their personality. We raised our children in an international air of respect of all people regardless of their nationality or faith, but they always identified themselves as Jews.

In due time my mother and grandfather moved to Kiev. They sold their house and received a two-bedroom apartment not far from where we lived. My mother was a pensioner and helped me to look after my children when I went to work. My mother lived with my grandfather, and my husband's mother, Beshyva, lived with us. In the last years of his life my grandfather was less religious. He didn't pray at home and went to the synagogue only on big holidays. We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays. My grandfather died in 1966 and my mother died in 1977. Beshyva died in 1977 at the age of 102. They were buried in the town cemetery. No Jewish traditions were observed at the funerals.

I met with my father several times: I visited him in 1944 and 1946. When I wrote him that I got married he stopped writing for some reason, although he knew my husband and knew that he was a decent man, but he probably didn't approve of our marriage due to the difference in age. I wrote to him several times and even sent letters with someone going to Yoshkar-Ola, but he never replied. My husband was rather upset about it. A few years later I received a telegram saying that my father was traveling from the Caucasus via Kiev. He asked me to meet him. My husband said that if he were in my shoes he wouldn't go to meet him. I kept thinking about what I should do. I went to the station, but changed my mind and returned home. It turned out that my father came to our home. When he rang the doorbell Israel said, 'Maya is not at home and I don't want to see you'. My father left and I never saw him again. I was very upset, but I didn't want to hold against my husband. I know that my father had three sons, but I never saw them and don't even remember their names. My father died in 1985. His wife notified me by sending me a telegram.

My older son, Michael, was a very smart child. He went to school before he turned six and finished it at the age of 15. His teachers advised him to study in Moscow. I went there with him. We submitted our documents to the Mathematics Faculty of Moscow University. There was a competition among those that passed exams. Michael didn't win it. Then we submitted the documents to the Faculty of Automation of Kiev Polytechnic Institute. Michael got a '3' in the main subject. I don't know whether it was anti-Semitism or whether Michael was just too shy at the exams since he was one and a half years younger than other applicants. It was evidently a mistake to submit our documents to the evening Faculty of the Chemical Machine Building Institute because they 'lost' them. That year Michael didn't enter any college. The next year our acquaintances advised us to go to Russia. Michael entered the Faculty of Radio Engineering in Taganrog and simultaneously studied at the Faculty of Mathematics of Rostov University. My younger son, Vitali, also studied at the college in Taganrog.

When Michael was a 4th-year student he married Tamara, a Russian girl. I had no objections to their marriage. I respected my son's decision. They came to Kiev after finishing university and Tamara found a job as a radio engineer in a design institute without problems while it took Michael with his 'Item 5' [39](#) several months before he found a job. Afterwards he worked at a computer center very successfully. He and Tamara lived together for several years before they parted. They had a daughter, Tania, but we are not in touch with her. Michael married Marina, a Jewish girl. She grew up in a family of atheists in Kiev. She finished a Russian school and Polytechnic College. She was an engineer and my son's colleague. Under the influence of his wife he moved to Israel in 1990. They live in Beer Sheva and are very content with their life. His daughter, my granddaughter Irina, born in 1985, serves in the army there. Of course, I would like to go there to see them, but my health condition is poor and the doctors don't allow me a change of climate. My son often calls me and supports me, but he is so busy that he cannot travel here.

My younger son, Vitali, and his wife Tamara - she is Russian - live in Chernovtsy where they moved after finishing college and getting jobs there. Their son, Oleg, is 25. Vitali was chief engineer at a big instrument manufacturing plant. The plant was shut down and Vitali is jobless now. Vitali often calls me. They don't have enough money to make a living since they receive very low pensions.

Perestroika [40](#) didn't bring anything good. We became poor in a jiff. Our children lost their jobs. We received good pensions and had savings. That's all lost. The level of culture dropped significantly. Many wonderful theaters closed. It seems nothing but money is important now. Of course, it's wonderful that people got an opportunity to travel, but I don't know who can afford this pleasure.

My husband and I were raised to be patriots of our country like all Soviet people. We never wished to move abroad, to Israel. My husband died in 1999. Almost all of my friends and acquaintances either died or moved abroad. I like socializing with people and I enjoy going to Hesed, a Jewish charity center. I read Jewish newspapers and watch the Jewish Yahad program [39](#) on TV. I like everything that has to do with Jewish history and culture, but I shall never be a believer.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Hasidism (Hasidic)**

Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

### **[2](#) Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia

and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

### **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

### **4 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

### **5 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.

### **6 Guild I**

In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

### **7 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.

### **8 Baal Shem Tov (The Besht) (1698-1760)**

The founder of the Jewish mystic movement called Hasidism. Born in Okup, a small village in Western Ukraine, he was orphaned at the age of 5 and was raised by the local community. He would often spend his time in the fields, woods and mountains instead of school. He worked as a

school aid and later as a shammash. He got married and settled in the Carpathian mountains not far from Brody. He studied alone for seven years and began to reveal himself in 1734. Moving to Talust, he gained a reputation as a miracle worker and soul master. Then he moved to Medzhibozh in Western Ukraine where he lived and taught for the remainder of his life. His teachings were preserved by his disciple Yakov Yosef of Polonoye.

## **7 Rabfak (Rabochiy Fakultet - Workers' Faculty in Russian)**

Established by the Soviet power usually at colleges or universities, these were educational institutions for young people without secondary education. Many of them worked beside studying. Graduates of Rabfaks had an opportunity to enter university without exams.

## **8 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.

## **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 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.

## **11 Zinoviev-Kamenev triumvirate**

After Lenin's death in 1924 communist leaders Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin formed a ruling



triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the Party in 1927. They recanted, and were readmitted, but had little influence. In 1936 Zinoviev and Kamenev, along with 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

## **12 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

## **13 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **14 Beriya, L**

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

## **15 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)**

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

## **16 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.

## **17 Gangs**

During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

## **18 White Guards**

A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

## **19 Podol**

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

## **20 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **21 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **22 Five-year plan**

five-year plans of social and industrial development in the USSR an element of directive centralized planning, introduced into economy in 1928. There were twelve five-year periods between 1929-90.

## **23 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.

#### **24 Subbotnik (Russian for Saturday)**

The practice of subbotniks, or 'Communist Saturdays', was introduced in the USSR in the 1920s. It meant unpaid voluntary work after regular working hours on Saturday.

#### **25 Torgsin stores**

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

#### **26 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

#### **27 Professor Mamlock**

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf - a friend of Bertolt Brecht - from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

#### **28 Kolkhoz**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

#### **29 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

### **30 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

### **31 Road of Life**

It was a passage across Lake Ladoga in winter during the Blockade of Leningrad. It was due to the Road of Life that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

### **32 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

### **33 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

### **34 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904)**

Russian short-story writer and dramatist. Chekhov's hundreds of stories concern human folly, the tragedy of triviality, and the oppression of banality. His characters are drawn with compassion and humor in a clear, simple style noted for its realistic detail. His focus on internal drama was an innovation that had enormous influence on both Russian and foreign literature. His success as a dramatist was assured when the Moscow Art Theater took his works and staged great productions of his masterpieces, such as Uncle Vanya or The Three Sisters. and also had some religious instruction.

### **35 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges

against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **36 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

### **37 Item 5**

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

### **38 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

### **39 Yahad program**

Weekly program of Jewish content on Ukrainian national television.