

Sophia Noginskaya

My name is Sofia Ilyinichna Noginskaya. I was born in 1956 in Leningrad and lived all my life in Vasilievsky Island, one of oldest districts of Saint Petersburg.

I was born late to my parents: my mother was 36, and Daddy was 45. Unfortunately, I never knew any of my grandparents - they died long before my birth.

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My family background

I want to tell you first a little of what I know about my father's family. My father - Ilya Abramovich Shneerov - was born in 1911 in the town of Lyubavichi [Lubavitch] in the Smolensk region, Rudyansk district. Originally the family name was Shneerson, but the well-known Lyubavichi [Lubavitch] rabbi Shneerson lived in the same district and all correspondence went to his address, so my father's father, my grandfather Abram Leibovich, changed his surname to Shneerov, to avoid the confusion. Until he was 10, Daddy lived with his parents in Lyubavichi. According to his stories, they had their own house, consisting of two or three rooms. Daddy, unfortunately, can not remember what his father's occupation was. His mother, Sarra Movshevna, did not work outside the home - she brought up her children. The family was religious; everyone spoke Yiddish. They surely lived in a religious way - prayed, observed Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. Daddy's family moved to Leningrad from the Smolensk district in 1934, but I do not know under what circumstances. There they lived in a shared apartment in Communications Union Street, block 11, near the main post office. They had 2 rooms, and Daddy lived there with his parents, brothers and sister. Father's father Abram Leibovich, born in 1876, suffered from tuberculosis and died before the [second World War] in 1935.

In 1938 Daddy went to work in Vasilievsky Island, at a defense industry factory. It was a secret enterprise and he worked there uninterruptedly until he retired in 1994 -- 56 years! He worked as a mechanic, a shop foreman, and also in the supplies department. It was from that factory that he was called up into the army, and after the war he returned to the same plant. Daddy fought on the Leningrad front. He is an invalid of the Great Patriotic War. He was wounded twice: the first time in his chest - a penetrating wound, and the second time in his leg. He also had to have three fingers amputated.

Three of my father's brothers -- Leib [1906-1943], Zalman [1919-1943] and Lev [1925-1943] -- died in Leningrad of starvation, during the siege, as did my grandmother Sarra Movshevna [1877-1943]. She is buried in our Preobrazhenskoye Jewish cemetery. I was named Sophia in her honor.

Daddy had three sisters. Feiga [Fanya] and Ida lived and worked in Leningrad all through the siege. They were awarded medals "For labor valor" and "For the defense of Leningrad ". Because of their experience during the war and the siege, neither of my aunts could link her life with a man, and both remained single. But Aunt Feiga Abramovna Shneerova had had a friend before the war who was drafted. He regularly wrote her letters from the front. I have kept these letters, checked by censors until now, and I recently handed them over to the "Hesed". The young man who wrote these letters was killed in the war. My aunt died seven years ago, when she was 83 years old.

The second aunt, Ida Abramovna Shneerova worked her entire life after the war. She lived for me, for my brother, and for our family, because she didn't have any other relatives. She died in 1989, at about the same age as her sister Fanya.

My father's youngest sister, Golda Abramovna Shneerova, Aunt Galya, was my favourite aunt. She passed away when I was in the 10th form in school, in 1973. She died of cancer. Aunt Galya was a medical specialist, and she served in the Army throughout the Great Patriotic War. She returned home only in 1949, because, as a military doctor, she continued to serve in the Far East, somewhere in China or Japan. Aunt Galya was awarded the order of Red Star and medals "For the defense of Moscow", and "For the capture of Koenigsberg". I also kept these medals and now have presented them to "Hesed".

Dad served in the infantry. I know of one occasion when his regiment was surrounded. Father was a junior lieutenant and the commander of the group. It happened that He was already wounded and could not walk -- he could only crawl. All his regiment was destroyed. Suddenly he saw a passing truck. The driver wanted to escape from Germans as fast as possible and did not want to pick up the injured. But Daddy had one cartridge left. He told the driver that if he wouldn't pick him up, he would shoot him. Then they'd be buried there together. The driver had to take father in the truck. That's how my dad stayed alive. He was awarded the Order of Red Star for his military valor.

My grandfather on mother's side was Borukh Livshits. Grandmother's name was Fanya, but I do not know their patronymics. Unfortunately, I never knew my grandmother or grandfather, therefore I can only relate what my mother told me. Mother's parents met each other in the small town of Surazh. Now it is in Bryansk region, formerly the Oryol region. We visited there several times, but only in the Soviet period. In 1934, during a time of famine, my grandparents moved to Ukraine, to the village of Bolshaya Lovcha near Krivoi Rog. Grandfather worked in a collective farm.

Grandmother raised their seven children. Mom had two sisters, Lyuba and Zina, and four brothers, Evsei [Zyama], Senya, Yasha and Grisha. Evsei was the eldest. My grandmother Fanya was a very hardworking woman; she worked day and night. There was never enough money. Grandfather worked in the collective farm, but he usually found time for entertainment as well -- outside the family. Therefore grandmother had an incredibly hard time. She carried absolutely everything upon her shoulders. However, as long as Aunt Zina, the eldest of her daughters, stayed in Bolshaya Lovcha, she, naturally, helped to bring up the younger children.

Senya was the first to settle in Leningrad. Grandmother's brother Evsei already lived there. Because Senya was a very talented boy, Uncle Evsei invited him to Leningrad to study. It was in 1935-1936. Senya entered the university and then "dragged" the others to Leningrad: my mom, Grisha (mother's youngest brother), Evsei, and aunt Zina. Aunt Lyuba stayed with her parents in Bolshaya Lovcha. After she graduated from a Jewish school there, she moved to Rostov and entered a vocational school. Then she worked in a telephone substation. Now, out of all mother's large family, only one person is still living - Aunt Lyuba, Lyubov Borukhovna. She lives in Leningrad now, in Dachny Avenue, she is 87 years old.

Let me tell you about what happened to Uncle Senya, mother's elder brother. He studied in the university, was the Komsomol leader of his group, and when in 1934 Kirov [a well-known party figure] was assassinated, Senya, as an activist, was arrested and taken away directly from the university. For some time he was kept in Kresty prison in Leningrad. Mother visited him there; they took him some clothes and foodstuffs, and then they were told that he was sent somewhere in the Krasnoyarsk region and parcels were no longer allowed ... I know that Senechka sent a photo to Mom, nobody knows how. And on that photo there was a stain. And he wrote to her: "Manechka, trust me that this stain is on the photo, not on my soul." That is - "I am innocent". When he was sent to Krasnoyarsk region, they lost trace of him. In the 1960s year Mom made several inquiries about him, and eventually we received word that he had been executed and rehabilitated posthumously.

During the war

During the war mother's elder brother Evsei worked near Leningrad, digging trenches. During the siege the youngest children stayed in town - my mother and Grisha. Evsei knew that they were hungry. At one point, in February 1942, having collected some food, he set off for town from his work to visit Mom and died somehow en route. He didn't reach Mom, nor did he return to where he worked. They found out about it later. I know about this because mother wrote it under his photo. Evsei was the most handsome of all his brothers and sisters. Mom was left only with Grisha, who was 18 in 1942. He died in March 1942 of starvation. He kept telling Mom that he was very hungry, and she, taking all the ration cards, set off to get some bread. When she returned, he was still alive, trying to tell her something, but his speech was incomprehensible. Most likely, he was taken to Piskarevsky cemetery [the mass burial place of Leningraders who died during the siege]. Mother transported his body with the help of an acquaintance...

On the eve of the war - in Ukraine its approach was felt quite distinctly - my grandparents asked their children in Leningrad to come back as soon as possible and take them away. Naturally, they set out to do so, but they were stopped on the way and sent back to Leningrad. They were told that it was impossible to reach Ukraine because the Germans were already there.

Thus, when the war began, mother's parents remained in the Ukraine, in the village of Bolshaya Lovcha. The wife of mother's brother Yasha [born in 1914] lived with them. She was pregnant. Her name was Raya. There were a lot of Jewish villages in the area; I remember the name of one of them: Kukolovka. When the Germans came, things were terrible. At first they forced all the Jews to work at physically hard labor. Young girls were sent to dig trenches. Then came the sad end. The village of Kukolovka was completely destroyed by Germans - all Jews were executed. At one point the Germans gathered everybody, and the Jews thought that they were going to be shot. They said

farewell to each other, but they were forced to dig a ditch for other people, who were shot that very day. My y [ndparentss?] were prese at that xecution and were then compelled to bury the bodies of the executed people, some of whom were still alive ... But this all happened in a neighboring village. They said that grandfather came home absolutely grey-haired, he could hardly speak. Then came the turn of Bolshaya Lovcha. Absolutely all people of Jewish nationality were executed as well as people of different origin who sympathized with and helped the Jews. The execution was carried out by Germans as well as by Ukrainians who were on their side. Among the Ukrainians were those who had lived side by side for years with the people they executed.

Now let's go back to Raya, the pregnant daughter-in-law. When she and some other women were returning from the ditch works, a Ukrainian approached them and told them: "Tomorrow all of you will be shot. Run for your life, girls!" Some of the women who were with Raya ran away, but she said: "Yasha will never forgive me if I escape and his folks are executed." And so she accepted a martyr's death together with her husband's parents.

Uncle Yasha, Yakov Borisovich, was another of my mother's brothers. It was his wife Raya who was executed by the Germans. Uncle Yasha was away fighting in the war, he suffered permanent injury. He was wounded in the first days of the war, on the Leningrad front, and was taken at once to Leningrad. When mother was informed that Yasha was wounded, she came running to the hospital. She could hardly recognize him at first. He asked her, "Manya, look, what did they hang there, on the back of my bed?" Attached to the back of his bed was a sheet of paper with a red cross on it. She said, "Yashenka, it's a cross." And he said, "It means, Manya, that you may just as well not come again, as I will not survive." And when mother pulled away the blanket, she saw that his leg was badly hurt, in the shin, or higher, in the hip... And Mom used to tell me that there were so many worms in the wound that she had never seen anything like it. Mother still continued to go to the hospital every day. Later, when the bombardments of Leningrad began, the hospital was evacuated. Mother's story went like this: "I packed his things and helped him get into the railway car with other people. And a few days later we heard that the train had been bombed and destroyed and only one car remained intact. And by miracle Uncle Yasha was in that very car. He stayed alive." He was evacuated to Rostov-on-Don. Then he was given shelter by Aunt Lyuba in Rostov-on-Don. Later, after the war, in 1947, he returned to Leningrad to the same room in 11 Communications Union Street where my parents' family had lived, and got married. He married a Jewish girl, Rosa Lifshits who had no parents and was brought up in an orphanage. A son, Borya, was born to them in 1948. But Uncle Yasha's illness steadily got worse. First he could only walk with a stick, then he could not walk at all. He developed a terrible weak-mindedness, and we had a lot of trouble with him. He got lost in town several times, and we had to look for him. Uncle Yasha passed away around 1992. He loved Pavlovsk very much; his elder sister Zina lived there and he often went there to visit her, so we buried him in Pavlovsk. His sister Zina is buried there; she died later - in 1994.

I can tell you a little about Aunt Zina too. She was mother's elder sister. Senya took her to Leningrad as well, but she lived in Pavlovsk. She got married and worked in the Pavlovsk orphanage. When the boarding school was being evacuated, Aunt Zina already had two children: Vova, who was 3 years old, and Alik, a newborn. Aunt Zina was evacuated with the orphanage. Alik died on the way. He was simply taken out of the car and left on the ground.

After the evacuation Aunt Zina returned to Pavlovsk and continued to work at first in the children's home, and then as a guard. She died 6 years ago. She had an accident and lay alone in the apartment, and we relatives, by turns, went to Pavlovsk and took care of her. Her son Vova had cancer and died one year before his mother. He left for Canada, thinking that they will help him there. Unfortunately, he died there after 8 months.

My mother, Manya Borukhovna Shneerova, was born in 1920 in the town of Surazh, and later moved with her parents to the Ukraine, the village of Bolshaya Lovcha. In 1935-1936 Senya, her brother, brought her to live with him in Leningrad. Mom studied in a Jewish school. After arriving in Leningrad, she was dependent on Senya for a few years. Then she entered the Institute of Foreign Languages. But it was just before the war, so she only managed to finish the first year.

In 1942, after she buried all of her brothers, she found herself absolutely alone, a young woman in her early twenties, a girl with no will to live. She was absolutely broken. She thought she was living her last days. She was desperately alone in her room in the house on Communications Union Street, when her Uncle Evsei Vladimirovich Lipkin arrived at her door. He had worked and lived in Leningrad before the war and now, during the siege. He was an expert in water supplies. He had modernized the entire water system in Leningrad, for which he was awarded the Order of Lenin. Later he was presented a trip to America as an award. I do not know in what year that was, but in those days it was a very big deal. That's how they singled out his work. That uncle, after no-one had heard anything from my mother for a very long time, came and saw that she was in very bad condition. He carried her in his arms as far as to the other end of the city to his apartment. His wife was not so pleased to see that dirty, poor and hungry Manya brought to their place. But Uncle Evsei told her that Manya would live there - and no further discussion! They had a daughter a couple of years younger than my mom. Mom didn't live there for a long time. Uncle Evsei spent the entire day at work, and Mom felt that Aunt Zlata's attitude to her, while for the most part normal, was not really very warm. Uncle Evsei found a job for Mom at a water supplies station in Shpalernaya Street. And Mom stayed there day and night - as if in a military barracks - and began to receive at least some food. She worked there all through the siege. She survived the entire siege of Leningrad and was awarded with medals "For labour valor" and "For the defense of Leningrad"...

My mother knew Daddy and his family before the war - they had lived in the same communal apartment in Communications Union Street. I think it was in 1935, when Mom appeared in Leningrad. Her brother Senya lived in Leningrad at that time, but in 1937 he was arrested and sent to jail, and Mom remained there alone. Sewer pipes passed through her room, and the exit was through the kitchen. At that time Mom and Dad had no relations.

After the war

But after the war, in 1945, when Daddy came back home from the front, they accidentally met on Lieutenant Schmidt Bridge. And this, probably, was the key moment in the life of my parents. They registered their marriage on Mom's birthday, August 20, 1945, and in 1946 my brother Arkady -- Alik -- was born. They all had to live in that same room with the sewer pipes. Very often the pipes leaked. Mom would take her baby Alik and spend the night in the kitchen. They lived very poorly - Dad was the only one who worked. There was not enough food, and Mom told me that she used to serve Daddy his meal and then go out into the street, so that she would to see him eat, because she was so hungry. It was in 1946-1947. I was born in 1956. Daddy was allotted a room by his

factory at 7 Gavanskaya Street. It was also a room in a shared apartment. Dad was still the only breadwinner in the family. Mom told me that she often had to borrow money. When Dad received his salary, she usually paid it all out for debts. Thus, when I turned 4, I was sent to a kindergarten, and Mom went to work in the same factory where Dad worked, as a storekeeper.

I'd like to add that in 1940 Mom had entered the Institute of Foreign Languages, but she only finished the first year and was forced to quit her studies when the war began. The war prevented both of my parents from receiving a higher education, and their only dream was for their children to obtain a higher education. They put all their efforts into fulfilling this goal. My brother first graduated from a technical school and then from the Northwest Polytechnical Institute. After graduating [secondary] school I entered the Construction Institute and graduated from the department of "Purification of natural and waste waters" in 1978, becoming an ecologist.

My parents and our family have always been an example for all our relatives. My parents lived together for 51 years. I cannot remember a single occasion when there were any arguments or scolding - it never happened! Mom was almost 10 years younger than Daddy, but still I think she was the head of the family. Our family was incredibly harmonious. As all my relatives said, in spite of the fact that my parents didn't receive a higher education, they were very cultured people - inside their souls, you know. Neither Daddy, nor Mom ever offended anybody. If someone needed help - it was a foregone conclusion that it would be given. And I think that, probably, their example and the way they brought me up have left a mark on my life, too, because I left my professional job and started to work with "Hesed", where at first I was a visiting nurse and now I am the curator of the home-nursing service. The awareness that I help elderly people brings me satisfaction. I feel better doing it. It might seem strange to many people, but I realize that this is my calling, my mission.

And here again I come back to the moment in 1945 when, Mom and Dad met on Lieutenant Schmidt Bridge. He had come back home from the war, using a walking stick ... Probably, their meeting was their fate. My parents' life was incredibly hard. They had no books. They didn't leave me anything. All there is, is the two-room apartment in which we are now talking. It was obtained through my parents' efforts, on account of their health. We lived four of us in the one room in Gavanskaya Street that had been allotted to Daddy. I can tell you that each time they distributed apartments at his factory, they said, Ilya Abramovich, you are the first in line. And each time Ilya Abramovich did not get an apartment. People explained this by the fact that he was not a member of the Communist party. There was no talk about him being a Jew, but in my opinion this is the only and evident reason.

In 1972, when I was in my ninth year at school, my mother decided to go to the place where her parents had been executed. Mother, Daddy and I went to Krivoi Rog. We rented a room there. Very quickly the news of our arrival spread through town. A woman who managed to escape the execution came to see us. She had been a very small girl at that time. There was another man, whose mother had been executed on the very same day as Mom's parents. His mother had been an activist, she even made a speech before her execution. I can not tell you precisely what year that was ... The rainy season had started but we still went to Bolshaya Lovcha. We dropped into houses where elderly people lived and asked them how all that had happened. We found a very old Ukrainian lady -- 102 years of age. She remembered mother's parents, and told us about them.

Unfortunately, we were unable to get to the place of execution. There was no taxi available. Because of the rains the road became impassable. The only thing I know is that there's a common grave and a small monument with an inscription saying that many Soviet citizens are buried there. On Victory Day, on May 9, many people, relatives of the executed, come to Bolshaya Lovcha from Moscow and other cities. A memorial plaque appeared later, saying that Jewish people were executed there. I doubt if I will go and look for the graves again. But mother was very upset that she was unable to pay her last tribute to her parents.

Now daddy is over 90 years old, and for two years now he's been living with my family. In his childhood Daddy studied in a Jewish school, so he can write Hebrew. After the war and while he was still able to walk – that is, until the 1990s – he regularly attended synagogue, where he had his own seat. Now, because of his age, he can neither pray, nor go to the synagogue. In earlier years, he read the Talmud and prayed in the synagogue. He didn't pray at home – he just didn't have time for that – he had all day long at work, and then, the life of a communal apartment didn't provide opportunities for a dialogue with God. Apart from the Talmud we have both talles and tefilin – the thing that is wound on one's hand during prayer -- at home, In general, we still have all father's articles of religious use.

During the entire 56 years that father worked at the factory, there was not a single day that he was even 5 minutes late. He always got up at 6 in the morning. His domestic duties included putting up a kettle for tea and making sandwiches for Mom. They would have their tea and leave for work. Dad walked very fast in spite of his bad leg, and Mom constantly ran behind him along Shkipersky lane and could not catch up with him. Their colleagues asked all the time: "Ilya Abramovich, did you have a quarrel with Manya Borisovna? Why is she running behind you?" They worked in different shops. Mom worked 26 years at that factory. The only day that Daddy never went to the plant, was the Remembrance Day [Yartzeit] of his parents' death. He spent that entire day in the synagogue – from the early morning until late in the evening. I think anything could have happened, but that day was sacred both for Daddy and for all of our family. At Passover my parents didn't eat any bread except for matzot. They tried to accustom their children to this tradition as well, but, unfortunately, children are sinful. Dad still eats only matzot on Passover. When my mother was alive, she and Dad rather frequently spoke Yiddish between themselves so that we children wouldn't understand. But with time we kids began to understand it, too. We could not speak Yiddish, but we followed. For some reason, I also remember Mom always cooking chicken broth and kneidlakh (dumplings).

Growing up

When I was 10 years old, in 1966, doctors discovered that Mom had cancer. They said she did not have any chance of survival. Dad gave his written consent for her to undergo an operation whose outcome was uncertain. It was performed by a 28-year old graduate of the medical institute, because no doctor, even the most experienced, would take the responsibility. The operation was carried out, and Mom survived -- she lived for another 30 years. She died in 1996. We are very thankful to those people who presented her with these 30 years ... We buried her in the Southern cemetery, in the Jewish section. The first of our family to be buried in that cemetery was Aunt Galya, father's sister, who died in 1973. Then Aunt Ida, Aunt Fanya and my Mom. All of them are buried in one place, the four of them. According to Jewish custom cremation is not allowed, but

because of circumstances we had to do it. We wanted all of them to be in one place. Each year in the autumn my husband takes Dad to the cemetery - we keep our promise to him. Daddy recites kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, himself, and last year, when he recited kaddish over the grave of my Mom and her sisters, some Jews came up and asked, if he could also recite kaddish over the neighboring graves. Daddy, naturally, could not refuse ... In spite of the fact that because of his age his memory is quite poor, he still remembers the kaddish.

In memory of father's parents we always light candles on the anniversaries of their death. They burn for a whole day. In memory of Mom's death we also light such a candle. In this way, we try to follow the national traditions.

I want to tell you a little bit about myself. I was born in 1956 because my father wanted another child very much. Mom was already 36 years old. They already had a ten-year-old son, Alik, and they were very limited financially. But Daddy wanted a daughter very much. And a daughter arrived. I went to all Pioneer and other recreation camps when in kindergarten and school, because, unfortunately, I did not have grandparents and there was nobody else to look after me. At seven I started school, and I completed 10 grades in a secondary school. I was a good student, in spite of the fact that neither Mom nor Dad could really help me. Mom, for example, checked my English. She checked my notebook exercises. I learnt later, though, that Mom did not know a word in English - she just pretended to be an expert. Mother also "helped" me in my Russian... I trusted her then. Daddy tried to help me with mathematics. Still, I was a good student - I was the best mathematician at school.

When I was trying to enter the Leningrad Construction Institute, I passed all my examinations and received an average admissions mark. But when they published the lists of admitted students, my name was not there. At that time Uncle Evsei, the one who had rescued Mom during the siege of Leningrad, was on the faculty of the Institute in the "Water supplies and water drainage" department. He was a senior lecturer. Mom called him up and asked, "Why isn't Sophia in the lists of admitted students? The acceptance mark was 18, she scored 19.5, but she is not on the list. Is it because we are Jewish?" Uncle Evsei was a communist, and he was convicted that there was no anti-Semitism in our country. He told Mom, "Manechka, it is impossible. There is nothing of the kind in our institute!" But still, he went to the institute to see the dean, and heard, "Evsei Vladimirovich, why didn't you tell us that she was your grandniece?" - "And why was I supposed to tell you?" he replied. The next day my name was inserted with a ballpoint pen in the general admissions list.

Husband and children

I got married in 1983. My husband's name is Ilya Leonidovich Noginsky. His mother, too, once lived in Surazh, where my Mom came from. Theirs was a rich Jewish family, with two children, twin sisters Eva Izrailevna [mother of my husband] and Rimma Izrailevna. Ilya's Dad, Leonid Yefremovich, comes from the town of Romny in Sumy district. Now my husband's parents live in Israel, they emigrated in 1998. They lived in Leningrad until 1962 in the Union of Communications Street, too, closer to St. Isaac's Cathedral, in a kind of basement. There was one room, on a floor slightly lower than the ground level. Since Mom and Aunt Eva both came from Surazh, they became good friends. For a time, they did not have any contact, but at one point my aunt Fanya, my father's sister, ran into "Mother Eva" [that's how I call my mother-in-law] in the synagogue. We went to the synagogue every week. Mother Eva had two sons: Ilya - the younger, born in 1955, and

Vova, 3 years older. Ilya was married then, so they brought Vovik to meet me. But just then I had pneumonia and probably looked too sickly, so nothing came out of this meeting. When Ilya divorced his wife, mother Eva [she is a very vigorous woman - always achieves what she wants] called my Mom on the phone a thousand times, and finally mother conceded: "OK, you can introduce them to each other if you like, but later on - whatever they decide themselves -- I am not going to say "yes", or "no".

I have to add that Ilyusha had already had two children. Before we got married, we dated for several years ... We have been together for 17 years now, and have a daughter who finishes the 11th form this year. Her name is Galya. We named her after father's youngest sister, but still we lacked the confidence to register her as Golda. My daughter now says: "Mom, I had better be Golda!" What is the reason for that? Since the very first day, when my daughter started to understand things, I tried to convince her that "Jew" was not a curse, but just a nationality. The essence of a person, his character - all this depends on the person himself, rather than on his nationality. When Galya came home from school crying that her classmates called her Jewish - they had looked in the class journal and read that she was the only Jew among them - I told her: "Galya, what makes you upset? What evil is there in being Jewish? Look at your grandfather, look at your grandmother, look at all our relatives. We killed nobody. We stole nothing. Everything that belongs to our relatives - any of them - was earned by their own hands and heads, by hard work. So you should be proud that you are Jewish, and not otherwise." I think that in due course she understood this. I also tell her, The girl is doing very well in her final year. She is going to try to enter the pedagogical institute, in the foreign language department.

Recent years

My husband graduated from a technical school and became an expert in designing aircraft devices. Then he served in the army from 1975 to 1977 in internal troops and later, in 1993 he entered the Leningrad Construction Institute, and graduated with a degree in architecture. Now he works as the chief architect for a private firm. He works day and night, because we'll need a lot of money for our daughter's higher education, since education is no longer free here in Russia. My husband's family was never religious; his parents were Jewish, but atheists, estranged from religious ideas and customs.

Ilya's first wife is a well-known composer, Zlata Razdolina. She emigrated to Israel 13 years ago. When she was getting permission for her departure, she wanted Ilya to relinquish parental rights to their children, but he said he wouldn't do it. The children were taken to Finland, and from there they moved to Israel. After Ilya, Zlata was married three more times. From the third marriage she has a son named Benya. He is the grandson of Semyon Laskin, a prominent writer. She took all her children to Israel. We totally lost contact with Ilya's children. We looked for them for a long time and sent inquiries to Israel. We got replies requesting us to at least specify the town where they lived, but we didn't even know that. Then, totally unexpectedly, through some distant friend, we learned where they lived, and even their telephone number. I was the first of us to visit Israel. Ilya's parents were still living there. I went under the "Sarel" program - it provides an introduction to the country and help to the Israeli army. I met my husband's daughter Olya and talked to his mother-in-law. After that, Ilya went for a visit. Everything went absolutely smoothly as well. His children had become religious in Israel. His son Zhenya, who was born in 1979, became a rabbi. He studied

to become a rabbi in America. He is already married and has a son named is Menakhem-Mendl. Olya, the daughter, is not so happy. She married a rabbi but divorced him when she was pregnant. Her daughter Rachel is not very healthy. You can't tell how Olya's future life will develop.... We call each other, we even try to buy and send this and that to our grandchildren. We have perfectly normal relations with them, and we enjoy it. We do not know how our daughter Galya's future will be, and [Zhenya and Olya] are her brother and sister, even though it is only on her father's side. I am trying my best to remain on good terms with Zlata and her children. Galya visited them for two weeks last summer, and we invited them to come and be our guests too.

[Sofia Ilyinichna is a woman devoted to the memory of her family, most of whom died during the Second World War. It induced her to tell us about the history of her family, about the fate of those who were witnesses to the uneasy life of Leningrad in those hard times. Sofia Ilyinichna is an active, cheerful woman with bright eyes. She combines care of her beloved elderly father with the work in the home-nursing service of Hesed.]