Margarita Farka

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Russia
St. Petersburg
Interviewer: **Zinovy Chereisky**
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Margarita Farka is a short, petite woman looking really young for her age.

She has black hair with hardly any gray streaks, bright dark eyes and pleasant features.

She is dressed neatly and elegantly. Her appearance is lively.

She speaks and behaves rather emotionally, but inevitably with an air of dignity.

She is a good storyteller and a very pleasant person to deal with.

She lives in a cozy three-room apartment on the ground floor of an old house situated on a quiet street of Petrogradskaya side [one of the central district of the city].

Part of the sitting room, where the interview took place, represents an improvised study of her husband, a prominent biologist. Her elder daughter Lilyana lives with them.

- **Family and childhood**

I preserved pictures of my forefathers, my maternal great-grandfather and great-grandmother, though I have never seen them in my life. I know that my great-grandfather Chaim Grienblatt and my great-grandmother – I don't remember her name – were born in Belarus, not far from Orsha [Orsha is a town in Vitebsk region, located in the north-eastern part of the Belarus Republic, 700 km south of St. Petersburg]. Their children were also born there: sons Iosif, Boris and Solomon and daughters Gitl, Feiga and Frida. Gitl Chaimovna Grienblatt, my grandmother, was born in 1893.

My grandmother's younger sister Feiga, whose common name was Fanya 1, was born in Orsha in 1899. In 1924 she moved to Leningrad [today St. Petersburg] and entered the First Medical Institute. In 1929 she was assigned 2 to work as a doctor in the Urals. [Editor's note: This had nothing to do with anti-Semitism: it was a common system in the USSR to send university graduates to work in some remote region of the country by 'assignment.'] Some years later she returned to Leningrad, where she lived till the end of her life.

Feiga was considered a person subject to the draft. [Editor's note: In the USSR women with secondary and higher medical education were registered at the military Committee and were subject to the draft in wartime]. When in 1939 World War II broke out, she was summoned to military service. She took part in the 'liberation' of western Ukraine 3 and later in the war with Finland 4. Thus, she participated in the war since 1939. She served in the 'medsanbat' [medical sanitary battalion] attached to a military airdrome during the war with Germany. She was in the war from 1941 to 1945 5, obtained the rank of a major of medical service and was awarded for service in battle with the Order of the Red Star 6 and the Order of the Patriotic War 7, and various medals.

Grandmother's parents lived in Orsha almost all their lives. I was told that they were religious people observing traditions: the kashrut, Sabbath, celebrating traditional holidays and attending the synagogue. In 1941, when the Great Patriotic War broke out, they managed to evacuate to Sverdlovsk region in the Urals, at the very last moment before the Germans arrived. [Sverdlovsk region was set up in 1934 in the Middle Urals, about 2,000 km east of St. Petersburg; in the 1930s/1940s large defense, machine-construction and metallurgical plants were built there, which played a very important part during the years of the Great Patriotic War.] They were provided lodging in a village. They could not work in the kolkhoz 8 because of their age and health, that is why they lived very poorly. They died of starvation, as a matter of fact, in 1942. They were buried there, at a common rural cemetery.

My maternal grandfather, Berko Nisonovich Shaposhnik, was born in 1881. He also came from Belarus, he and Grandmother were distant relatives. Apart from the above-mentioned ones, I don't know any other relatives in Belarus. My grandparents both studied in a Jewish religious school. They spoke mostly Yiddish with each other. Later Grandmother learned Russian rather well, spoke without an accent and could write rather correctly. Grandfather spoke Russian with a shtetl accent till the end of his life and often used grammar cases incorrectly.

They moved to Kiev [today Ukraine] from Orsha in approximately 1910. Grandfather was a qualified tailor and Grandmother was a housewife. Their family was not religious, they did not observe any traditions and did not perform any ceremonies. In his youth Grandfather was a member of the Bund 9, a social-democratic organization, which consisted mostly of Jewish craftsmen. During the first years of the Soviet power he was once even elected delegate in the Municipal Council. Financially, though, they were an average family.

My mother, Eidel Berkovna Shaposhnik, was born in 1912 in Kiev, and her brother, my uncle Miron, was born in 1918. My mother finished a common Soviet high school and entered the Conservatoire. Soon she met my father, married him and quit the Conservatoire.

My father, Miron Naumovich Kopeikin, was born in 1904 in the town of Belaya Tserkov [100 km south-west of Kiev]. I know almost nothing of Father's family or relatives. I know that Father had brothers, rather old people. There were several of them. I remember Uncle Victor, who served in the army. I don't remember anything else about their family. My father studied in cheder and later finished a Rabfak school 10. He continued his education at the correspondence department of the Institute of Electrical Welding Equipment and worked as an engineer at the Kiev Water Supply Station.

My parents got married in Kiev in 1933. Their marriage was a common-law one, without any synagogue or traditional ceremonies, as was typical for the USSR at that time. Mother didn't change her last name. Many Soviet Jews of the elder generation, who were born in small shtetls before the Revolution 11, gave themselves adapted names in common life in order to make communication easier. Thus, Mother was called Yevgeniya Borisovna among her colleagues at work and by neighbors at home. Children of my generation and, moreover, later generations, were given names, not differing from those of the rest of the Soviet citizens. To call children Naum, Ruvim, Isaac, Rakhil or Revekka meant subjecting them to additional threat of anti-Semitism at school and in the yard.

I was born in Kiev in 1934. I got the name Margarita. We lived together with my maternal grandparents and my uncle Miron. Besides, my great-grandmother, the mother of my maternal grandfather, lived with us too. Father's relatives also lived in Kiev, but separately from us. His father was a very old man.

We lived relatively close to downtown Kiev. We lived in a communal apartment 12, which consisted of seven rooms. Russians, Karaims 13 and a Jewish family lived in that apartment. We had two rooms in that communal apartment. We were great friends with our Jewish neighbors. They all spoke Russian, as well as everyone in our family. And with the rest of the neighbors we were on normal terms and there was no animosity or fights, at least, I don't recall any. I was raised at home and played with children in the yard. I don't remember any manifestations of anti-Semitism at that time.

Our family was not religious, including my grandparents, we all wore common clothes, Grandfather didn't wear payes or a kippah, we didn't observe any ceremonies or attend the synagogue. Since my grandparents often spoke Yiddish to each other, I understood Yiddish and still do, though I never spoke it. Grandfather worked as a cutter at that time in a tailoring atelier, Mother was a controller in a Savings bank department and Father worked as an engineer at the Municipal Water Supply Station.

- **During the war**

When early in the morning on 22nd June 1941 the war with Germany broke out, we hid in the bomb shelter. I remember that first bombing of Kiev on the first day of the war. The Germans approached Kiev swiftly. We hesitated for a long time, whether we should leave or not. Right before the war my little brother Anatoly was born and Mother did not want to leave because of the baby. Finally we decided to leave, but Father remained in Kiev. He worked at the Kiev Water Supply Station, which was considered a strategic object. He was released from army enrollment and given 'reservation,' since he was to blow up the Kiev Water Supply Station, if the Germans came. Thus he stayed in Kiev. My great-grandmother, the mother of my maternal grandfather, stayed with him, because she could hardly walk by that time; she was very old and didn't leave the house.

As we were able to find out later, Father and all his relatives, who had stayed in Kiev, perished. The last letter, dated 1st September 1941, we received from him en route. The Germans executed them all by shooting in Babi Yar 14. Great-grandmother was betrayed by our neighbors, the Karaims. She also perished. A great many Jews, who stayed in Kiev, perished in Babi Yar.

We left Kiev in August 1941 on board the last steamship along the Dnepr River. Mother, her brother Miron, my grandparents, my little brother Anatoly and I left together. We headed to the town of Stalino [largest industrial center in Donbass in the Eastern part of Ukraine; it was called Yuzovka until 1924, now it is called Donetsk]. The family of Uncle Victor, Father's younger brother, lived there. He was a military officer and his family lived there.

We sailed along the Dnepr on board the steamship. We were bombed often, especially when the steamship passed under bridges. The bridges across Dnepr were also bombed. It was terrifying. Finally we reached Dnepropetrovsk [today Ukraine] and got onto a train, which brought us to Stalino. We lived there for about two weeks in the family of my father's younger brother. Soon the Germans began to bomb Stalino and we had to move somewhere else. We had no other relatives.

I remember very well, that we passed Rostov-on-Don on 1st September in 1941. I was to go to school, to the first grade on that date and I was upset that it didn't happen. We were taken off the train soon and sent to work in a kolkhoz not far from Rostov-on-Don. All our family went there on a cart, drawn by oxen. When we arrived there, we found out that there was no water source in the village. They only had rainwater collected in basins. Mother refused to stay there, as she had a baby. So we were sent further.

We left Rostov by train in an open car. The cars were two-story, divided in two, without a roof. I could see everything, since we sat on the second story. The train didn't get under bombing, but we had enough of other difficulties. Besides, there was no toilet. Mother breast-fed the baby. Almost all evacuated women had small children too. It was absolutely unknown, for how long that train would stop at the station or when it would leave. I still remember the fear of being left behind. Finally, we reached the station of Mineralnye Vody [town and large railroad junction in the south of Stavropol territory, at the foothills of the Northern Caucasus].

We rented a room from a woman in Mineralnye Vody. Grandfather began to work as a tailor. We lived there for two months, until the end of October. Soon the German planes began to bomb the station heavily, as it was a significant railroad junction. The bombings were terrible. Once several troop trains with children and refugees were bombed. It was absolutely horrible, a real nightmare. Grandfather worked as a tailor in an atelier near the railroad station. He survived by miracle. After that bombing we decided to move further to the East.

We reached Makhachkala [a town and port on the Caspian Sea, at the foothills of the Northern Caucasus, the capital of Dagestan Republic] by train. There were huge lines of people there, who wanted to cross the Caspian Sea on board a steamship. We had the right to do so, some privilege, as Mother had a baby. We spent several nights outside in the street, waiting for the steamship. One of the local Russian women pitied us and we spent some nights at her place. Finally on board a steamship we crossed the Caspian Sea and got to Turkmenistan [one of the Soviet Republics in the south-west of Central Asia, an independent state since 1991]. We disembarked in the town of Krasnovodsk, a port on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. Today's Turkmenistan, which obtained independence, calls this town Turkmenbashi, in honor of the Turkmen President.

We moved to Kazakhstan from Krasnovodsk [Soviet Republic in the Central Asia steppes, an independent state since 1991], to Alma-Ata [a town in the south of Kazakhstan, at the foothills of the Zailiysky Alatau mountain range, was the capital of Kazakhstan until 1995]. This town is not the capital of today's independent Kazakhstan and is now called differently – Almaty. At first we spent

the nights at the railroad station. Later we were provided with lodging on the outskirts of Alma-Ata. We were given a room in a barrack. Mother got a job as an accountant at the tobacco factory. The work was very hard and the payroll was very low. The money was earned for the family mostly by Grandfather, who constantly took tailoring orders.

I fell sick with measles there and my brother Anatoly died of diphtheria when he was two years old. He survived all the terrors of our travel and when our life in evacuation became more or less settled, he died. It happened in 1943.

Mother's brother Miron evacuated together with us to Alma-Ata. He was young but he had very bad eyesight. He was not subject to the army draft, but was considered capable of working. We could have all been sent to a kolkhoz to work, since one member of the family – Miron – was capable of working. That is why he left for Siberia. He hoped that he would be accepted as a volunteer to the army there. But he was not. He settled in the town of Biysk, got married – I know nothing of his wife – and lived there until the end of the war. After that they moved to Moscow.

I began to go to school in Alma-Ata in 1942. I started my studies in the middle of the school year and I had to catch up with my classmates. I faced anti-Semitism for the first time at school and 'got it in full.' The attitude to children was bad there, especially to those who were evacuated from Russia, especially Jews. Anti-Semitism was rather widespread and children displayed it in offensive conversations, sneers and importunate annoyances.

Boys and girls studied separately at school at that time, but there were not enough classrooms. There was only one school building in the district. Boys studied in the first shift and girls came for the second shift. On their way to school girls had to pass through a line of boys, who stood outside after their classes had finished. They harassed us rather rudely. Perhaps it was their way of flirting. Al least it was a torture for me. The boys were Russian; there were not that many Kazakhs there.

I cannot say that I was beaten up. Only one boy beat me there once. Later I found out that he lived in our barrack and, besides, was a year younger than myself. I was angry and next time we met, I hit him on the nose so hard that he bled. His mother later came to sort out the situation with my mother. I became friends with that boy in the end. Mother earned little, and the main breadwinner in our family was Grandfather, who earned money by sewing and always had orders.

As for the climate, I mentioned already that Alma-Ata is located in the south of Kazakhstan, on the foothills, so the climate in this region is temperate: summers are not very hot and winters not very cold but pretty mild, especially as compared to the sharply continental climate of the steppe regions of the country.

We lived in Alma-Ata until the end of the war. We didn't know anything about my father during the war. Mother was looking for him for a long time and finally received an official paper saying that he had been arrested by the Gestapo in Kiev and had perished. We don't know where he was buried.

- **Life in Leningrad and Albania**

In May 1945 the war ended. Mother wanted to go home to Kiev very much, she left for Kiev and I stayed with my grandparents. Mother tried to find our relatives, our apartment and belongings in Kiev. But there was no trace of our relatives. They all perished. Our rooms in the communal

apartment were occupied by strangers. There was nowhere to go back to. Mother didn't know what to do.

My grandmother's sister Feiga, who lived in Leningrad at that time, wrote a letter to my mother. She wrote that since there were so few left of them, they had to get together. Mother went to Leningrad. Aunt Feiga lived in a communal apartment in a small room of 14 square meters. With great difficulty she managed to get a permission to register her sister in her room 15. It was very difficult. They started to live together with my mother. I stayed in Alma-Ata with my grandparents for several years.

1950 was the year I turned 16 and it was time for me to get my passport. The citizens of the USSR got a registration stamp into their passports according to the place where they lived. Based on the regulations of the day, registration in big cities in the USSR, like Moscow and Leningrad, where supply of food and economic goods was much better than in the rest of country, was restricted. In 1949 I went to visit my mother in Leningrad in order to get registration at the moment of obtaining my passport. Mother and Aunt Feiga made a lot of efforts in order to change their 14-square-meter room for a bigger one. Almost everybody lived in communal apartments at that time, in very constrained conditions. Several more years were spent in efforts to find an appropriate option. We found a big room of 26 square meters, divided by a partition, with the help of a broker. The partition didn't reach the ceiling, but there remained an illusion of two rooms. After that my grandparents came to Leningrad. We began to live in a new communal apartment all together in this very divided room. Mother and Aunt Feiga lived in one room and my grandparents and I lived in the other one.

Four other families lived in our apartment. Two Russian families of two brothers, total drunks, remained in my memory. One of the brothers was good-natured: he beat only his wife and treated my mother rather well. The other one got drunk seldom, but was very malicious. He got drunk, lay down on the rug under our door and expounded his attitude to us: to all Jews in general and to my grandfather, grandmother and mother in particular. At that time my very old grandfather was the only man in the family. He was God knows how old and he was not able to defend us. We had to tolerate all that boorishness. We had good relations with other families in the apartment and we were friends with all other women-neighbors.

I finished high school in Leningrad, managed to finish the tenth grade. There was no anti-Semitism at school, the relations with my classmates and teachers were just fine. When my classmates came to visit me, my grandmother always treated them to something delicious. I studied well, but I wasn't an excellent student. I did not get a medal [distinction].

After school I decided to enter the Electrical Engineering Institute named after V. I. Ulyanov-Lenin [LETI]. It was in 1951. The Soviet propaganda was conducting a battle against 'bowing to the West,' trying to establish the 'priority' of Russia and the USSR in all sciences. The teachers warned entrants during consultations, 'Do not say 'Voltaic arc' by any means, it was renamed into 'Petrov's arc.' They repeated that endlessly. I got a question about that arc at the examination. I called it 'Voltaic arc,' as if hypnotized, and got a 'satisfactory' mark. All in all, I got a lot of 'satisfactory' marks in the entrance exams, which was absolutely undeserved, in my opinion.

They simply didn't want to admit me to this prestigious Institute. Stalin was still alive. There existed a secret, though strict entrance rate for Jews at the Institutes. Jews were not accepted to

the best Institutes, especially to the University, at all. The same happened with acceptance to work. There was a popular joke about a personnel department manager, who said, 'Those Jews, who study at Institutes or work, are our Soviet Jews; but those Jews, who try to find a job or enter an Institute, are Yids.' In reality, it was not a joke, but a principle of personnel policy of that time.

Anti-Semitism was very strong after the war 16. It didn't really have an impact on our family, but it was impossible not to notice it being displayed. Take as an example, Aunt Feiga, who played an important part in my fate. She was a lonely person; she didn't have a family of her own. She assisted us all her life. I owe her so much. Feiga lived a long life, almost throughout the 20th century, but she faced difficulties exactly in those years.

After demobilization in 1945 when Aunt Feiga returned to Leningrad she worked on Vassilyevsky Island as the head of the Therapeutic Department in a hospital. When the Doctors' Plot 17 started in 1953, we were very much afraid that she would be arrested or fired. Many Jewish doctors were treated like that at that time. Fortunately, she was simply dismissed from the position of a department head and made a common physician. Probably, the hospital management respected her and her services. After Stalin's death she was soon appointed head of the department again. Unfortunately, not all Jews survived like that the persecution in those years.

Having failed to enter LETI, I submitted my papers to the correspondent department of the Forestry Engineering Academy named after S. M. Kirov. I was admitted to the Faculty of Mechanics and Technologies, from which I graduated in 1956. It was at the academy that I got acquainted with my husband-to-be, Ismail Farka. He came to the USSR to study from Albania, which was considered a country of 'people's democracy' at that time, like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and other USSR allies. The governments of those countries sent young people to study in the USSR, often such students were talented and promising. We fell in love with each other. I married him when I was an undergraduate student.

Ismail was not a Communist. He was an excellent student at school and finished school with a golden medal. He was a very talented man. He got excellent marks at all subjects at the academy. During the war his aunt hid Albanian guerillas-anti-fascists. Owing to his aunt's guerilla secret address and his own talents, Ismail obtained the opportunity to study in the USSR, but he had no right to choose either an institute or a profession. He went to study where he was assigned to.

Ismail had a religious Muslim family. He was an atheist, but his family observed the Ramadan fast and did not eat pork. His family kept Muslim traditions. His parents were at first terrified when they found out about our marriage. His mother wrote to him that all their relatives would turn away from us, that it would be ineffable horror. However, when he wrote to his relatives about the birth of our daughter, all their protests stopped. A child was sacred for them. I gave birth to our child in Leningrad in 1956. We called her Lilya – full name Lilyana – at home.

I lived at the dormitory with Ismail in a separate room. When he was an undergraduate, he asked the embassy for permission to stay in the USSR, but he was refused. When he graduated from the Institute and defended his final thesis, he had to go back to Albania. I remained in Leningrad for several months, working as an engineer at the factory of musical instruments named after A. V. Lunacharsky. Later I obtained a visa and the year after I went to my husband together with our child. It was in 1957.

I was met and welcomed cordially in Tirana, Albania. All relatives were very glad to see both me and our daughter. His mother treated me very well. When she was asked, ‘Is your daughter-in-law Russian?’ she usually replied, ‘No, she is from Leningrad.’ I honestly don’t know why she answered that way. My husband Ismail worked in the town of Elbasan and came home only for Saturday and Sunday. His parents had a house of their own on the outskirts of the town.

Since Ismail was not at home during the whole week, I had to go validate my papers together with his father. I did not speak Albanian at that time yet. I was asked about my nationality at one of the institutions. I said that I was a Jewess. Thus his father found out about my Jewish origin. The information did not really influence the attitude of my husband’s relatives toward me. By the way, during World War II many Albanians, both Muslims and Christians, behaved decently toward local Jews, saved them from the Nazis, as compared to the neighboring Christian Greece, where almost the entire Jewish population perished.

I lived in Albania for four and a half years. At first I lived in Tirana and worked as a construction engineer at a mechanical plant. Later I was chief power engineering specialist at a wood-processing combine in the town of Elbasan. My husband worked as chief engineer of that combine. Our daughter Lilyana attended a kindergarten. It was difficult for her at first, but soon she learned the Albanian language.

Soon the relationship between Albania and the USSR became complicated and developed into a critical conflict. I faced a dilemma: to stay or to go back home. I had to decide for myself and for Lilyana, since Ismail would not have been let out of the country. No one forced me to leave. When I appealed to the Embassy of the USSR about our future life, I was told that I should have thought about it earlier, before I had gotten married. There were many such mixed families. We tried to find out if there would be a plane to Moscow. But we were told that there was no information. We hesitated for a long time, went to talk to an acquaintance of ours, the Secretary of the Plant’s Party Committee. By the way, Ismail was a member of the Albanian Workers’ Party. Finally Ismail made a final decision – Lilyana and I had to leave for the USSR. After the relations between the USSR and Albania were broken, there was no telephone or post connection between the countries, and for a number of decades Ismail and I knew nothing about each other!

Many years later, when we met after more than three decades, Ismail told me that it was the wisest decision in his life. Soviet wives, who stayed with their husbands, were arrested and imprisoned for eight to ten years. Ismail was also thrown into prison, since he refused to divorce me officially. He was told, ‘You don’t want to divorce, which means that you hope that the relations with the USSR will improve.’ He stayed in prison for more than twelve years, besides, he was tortured. During the following meetings with Ismail I understood that it was a very painful subject for him, so I tried not to ask more questions about it.

I returned to Leningrad with Lilyana in 1961, to our communal apartment, where all our relatives lived. Upon arrival I got a job as a construction designer at the ‘Elektrik’ plant and in 1965 I was transferred to the VNIIESO Institute [institute of electrical welding equipment], where I continued to work until retirement. After that there was a short break in my working career, and later I worked for seven years as a teacher in a Jewish kindergarten in St. Petersburg, starting from 1995. By the way, some people, especially those who survived the war, keep calling the city Leningrad rather than St. Petersburg 18.

Mother worked as a controller in a Savings Bank department. She became a very nervous and touchy person. By the age of 30 she lost her husband and her baby and was absolutely lonely in her further personal life. Unfortunately, such was the fate of many women of her generation. As she grew old, she developed strong tremor, her hands were shaking. It was necessary to help her with everything, even to take off the pans from the stove. In spite of her nervousness, she got on very well with strangers. Her colleagues and our neighbors treated her very well. She lived until the age of 63 and died in Leningrad in 1975.

Grandmother helped with the household until the end of her life. She died in 1965. Grandfather worked as a cutter in an atelier in Leningrad and also did some additional work at home. However, his sight began to worsen, he started to spoil orders and we prohibited him to work. He couldn't live without working and tried to go to the library and help about the house. He lived a long life and died in 1974. All my relatives were buried at the so-called Jewish section 19 at the Yuzhnoye [Southern] cemetery in Leningrad – though they were not religious people, as many Jews in Soviet times.

When I returned, the Repatriation Committee helped me to get in line for improvement of living conditions. Once I received a phone call about an apartment. Thus I got a separate one-room apartment with my daughter Lilyana.

Several years after my return home, there was still no connection with Albania and no hope for the restoration of diplomatic relations with it. I knew nothing about Ismail and had no chance to learn anything. So I applied to the court in Leningrad, stated my situation, and the court passed a resolution on my divorce. Thus I had a 'one-sided divorce.'After second marriage

- **After second marriage**

In 1969 I got married for the second time. My second husband is a Jew; his name is Izyaslav Moiseyevich Kerzhner. He was born in Dnepropetrovsk in 1936 and got a Jewish name at birth – Yeguda. A child with such a name could not have lived in Russia, he would have been tormented. So later his parents changed his name to a Russian one, Izyaslav. His parents were office workers; they were not religious people and their income was pretty average.

As a schoolboy Izyaslav was already keen on Biology and compiled collections of insects. But in the 1950s state anti-Semitism in Ukraine was the strongest in the USSR, and for this reason he was able to enter the Biological Faculty of a university only in the neighboring republic of Moldova, in Kishinev [capital of Moldova, former Soviet republic]. Later on, when the department of entomology was liquidated in that university, he moved to the Biological Faculty of Leningrad State University with great difficulties, as he had to pass extra exams, and then he graduated from Leningrad State University successfully. We first met in a group of friends. He was divorced and had no children from his previous marriage. Soon we got married and in 1974 our daughter Olga was born.

My aunt Feiga helped me once again. In the 1960s, a decree on the improvement of living conditions for women-front-line-soldiers, who did not found a family, was issued, and she got a separate apartment. As a result of a complicated exchange of apartments and my husband's room, we received a separate three-room apartment on Vyazemsky Avenue, where I still live together with my husband and daughter Lilyana, after Aunt Feiga died in 1994.

Our generation is referred to as ‘the generation of the 1960s.’ We literally snatched the novel by Ilya Erenburg 20, ‘Thaw,’ which was published after Stalin’s death. The title of this novel was symbolic indeed, and it anticipated the ‘thaw’ of the political climate in the USSR at the end of the 1950s. Later we were very much carried away by the story by Alexander Solzhenitsyn 21, ‘One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.’ We were very glad to see that poetry by Osip Mandelshtam 22, Nikolai Gumilev 23, Marina Tsvetaeva 24 and prose by Isaac Babel 25 and others came back from oblivion. [The interviewee enumerates ‘worshipped’ Russian men of letters of the 20th century, whose works developed the cultural wealth of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1960s/1970s].

Most of these writers and poets were victims of Stalin’s repressions. The poet Nikolai Gumilev, for example, who was one of the leading representatives of Acmeism, a literature trend of the beginning of the century, was shot as a participant of a counter-revolutionary plot. He was rehabilitated posthumously in the 1990s. The poet Osip Mandelstham and writer Isaac Babel were illegitimately repressed and killed, and the poetess Marina Tsvetaeva, who returned to the USSR after 17 years of immigration in 1939, committed suicide. We used every opportunity to listen to the western radio stations from behind the ‘Iron Curtain.’ It was a pleasure to breathe some fresh air of ‘freedom.’

Between the 1960s and 1980s there was no connection with Albania. I knew nothing about Ismail or about his fate. When in 1989 democratic changes started in Albania, I managed to get some information about Ismail. In 1989 he visited me in St. Petersburg with his wife and daughter. We saw each other after such long a parting. They spent more than three months in St. Petersburg. I found out that he didn’t know anything about me either. He also got married for the second time. His wife is an Albanian, she is a Christian. Their daughter is my younger daughter’s coeval: she was born the same year, in 1974. In the 1990s Ismail was appointed Ambassador to Czechoslovakia and later to Denmark. In 1993 I visited Prague with our daughter Lilyana following his invitation. Later Lilyana visited him there with my younger daughter Olga. At present Ismail lives in the USA with his family and works there. He obtained American citizenship as a person, repressed by the Communists.

Many of our friends emigrated to Israel, but for our family it was difficult. First of all because my husband had a very interesting job, which he loved and which was an essential part of his life. He would not possibly have found such job in Israel because of his age, lack of language knowledge and so on.

My elder daughter Lilyana finished a school with thorough English study and later graduated from the Faculty of Biology of the Leningrad University. She now works at the Cytology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She doesn’t have a family of her own and lives with me and my husband.

My younger daughter Olga graduated from the Electrical Engineering University, the former LETI, where I tried to enter once unsuccessfully. She met her husband-to-be there and married him. In 1996 their daughter Alexandra was born, my granddaughter. She attends a Jewish kindergarten. Olga worked in that kindergarten as a cook, when she studied at the university. Olga’s husband Alexey Kulin is Russian. We have very good relations with him and his parents. However, his relatives, especially the grandmother of my son-in-law, expressed certain discontent with the fact that Sasha [affectionate for Alexandra] attends a Jewish kindergarten. My son-in-law is an expert on

computer technologies. He works as a manager in a large company. They live separately from us.

Mikhail Gorbachev 26 coming to power and the beginning of perestroika 27 brought about vigorous development of Jewish cultural, social and religious life throughout the country and in our city in particular. Jewish schools, kindergartens, community and cultural centers were established. And, having finished working as an engineer in 1995, I started working as an educator in one of the Jewish kindergartens and have worked there with great pleasure for seven years. At the moment, since my daughter Olga and my son-in-law have too much work, I help them to bring up my granddaughter Alexandra and to prepare her for entering the high school next year.

At present my husband is a famous scientist-entomologist. He is one of the oldest employees of the Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, where he holds the position of the Chief Research Officer. He is a Doctor of Biological Sciences, a Professor, a magazine editor, a member of an International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, a member of the Russian Entomological Society Presidium. As a participant of scientific expeditions and conferences, he has been to many countries, including the USA, Mexico, Cuba, Mongolia, many states in Western Europe. His friends and colleagues invited him to visit Bulgaria, France and Germany, where I traveled together with him. I am really content with my life.

- **Glossary:**

1 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.

2 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.

3 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

4 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)
The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

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.

6 Order of the Red Star
Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

7 Order of the Great Patriotic War
1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

8 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.

9 Bund
Universal Jewish Social-Democratic Union, set up in western provinces of Russia in 1897. A representative of Bund was among the founders of the RSDRP (Russian Social-Democratic Party) at its I Congress. At the II Congress the RSDRP delegates refused to organize the Party based on federal principles and admit Bund as the only representative of the Jewish proletariat. The Bund dropped out of the Party. During the Revolution of 1905-1907, at the IV ('Unifying') Congress of the RSDRP (1906) the Bund was again accepted to the Party, but expelled from it in 1912 for program requirement of 'cultural and social autonomy'. In 1921 the Bund was liquidated, some of its members were accepted to the Communist Party. Many ex-members of the Bund became victims of Stalin's repressions of 1930s.

10 Rabfak (workers' faculty)

3 or 4 years full-time or part-time general education institutions in the USSR for preparation of young working people, who did not receive secondary education in due time, for entering higher education institutions and obtaining higher education. Were organized in 1919. by the end of 1930s were shut down because of development of secondary schools.

11 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.

12 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.

13 Crimean Karaites

Also known as Karaims and Qarays, they are a community of ethnic Turkic adherents of Karaite Judaism in Eastern Europe. ‘Karaim’ is a Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Polish name for the community. Originally centered in Crimea, Karaims were established in Lithuania and elsewhere in Europe from late medieval times. The name ‘Crimean Karaites’ is something of a misnomer, as many branches of this community found their way to locations throughout Europe and the Middle East. Nevertheless this name is used for the Turkic Karaite community which originated in Crimea to distinguish it from historically Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic-speaking Karaites of the Levant, Anatolia, and the Middle East (i.e. to show the difference between the ethnic group and the religious denomination).

14 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.

15 Residence permit

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit

and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

16 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'.

17 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.

18 Blockade of Leningrad

On 8th September 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until 27th January 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.

19 Jewish section of cemetery

In the USSR city cemeteries were territorially divided into different sectors. They often included common plots, children's plots, titled militaries' plots, Jewish plots, political leaders' plots, etc. In some Soviet cities the separate Jewish cemeteries continued to be maintained and in others they were closed, usually with the excuse that it was due to some technical reason. The family could decide upon the burial of the deceased; Jewish military could for instance be buried either in the military or the Jewish section. Such a division of cemeteries still continues to exist in many parts of the former Soviet Union.

20 Erenburg, Ilya (1891-1967)
Famous Jewish Russian novelist, poet and journalist who spent his early years in France. His first important novel, The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurento (1922) is a satire on modern European civilization. His other novels include The Thaw (1955), a forthright piece about Stalin's régime which gave its name to the period of relaxation of censorship after Stalin's death.

21 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander (1918-)
Russian novelist and publicist. He spent eight years in prisons and labor camps, and three more years in enforced exile. After the publication of a collection of his short stories in 1963, he was denied further official publication of his work, and so he circulated them clandestinely, in samizdat publications, and published them abroad. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970 and was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 after publishing his famous book, The Gulag Archipelago, in which he describes Soviet labor camps.

22 Mandelshtam, Osip Emilyevich (1891-1938)
Russian Jewish poet and translator. He converted to Lutheranism to be able to enter the University of St. Petersburg. He started publishing poetry from 1910 and in 1911 he joined the Guild of Poets and was a leader of the Acmeist school. He wrote impersonal, fatalistic, meticulously constructed poems. He opposed the Bolsheviks but he did not leave Russia after the Revolution of 1917. However, he stopped writing poetry in 1923 and turned to prose. He had to make a living as a translator of contemporary German, French and English authors. In 1934 he was arrested for writing an unflattering epigram about Stalin and sentenced to three years' exile in the Ural. In Voronezh, Mandelshtam wrote one of his most important poetic works, The Voronezh Notebooks. He returned to Moscow in 1937 but was arrested again in 1938 and was sentenced without trial to five years' of hard labor. According to unverifiable reports he died of inanition either in 1938 in a transit camp near Vladivostok in the Far East, or in 1940 in a labor camp on the Kolymar River, Siberia.

23 Gumilev, Nikolai Stepanovich (1886-1921)
Russian poet and playwright. In 1911 he became one of the founders of the 'Poets' Guild', a creative group of poets-modernists active between 1911-1914 and 1920-1922, and helped to form a new literary trend called acmeism. His 1912 work, Foreign Skies, brought him full recognition as a poet. From 1918-1921 Gumilev was one of the most prominent figures in the literary circles of Petrograd [today Saint Petersburg]. The Pillar of Fire (1921) ranks among his best volumes of verse from this period. Gumilev was offered to join the conspiratorial officers' 'Petrograd Fighting Organization', which plotting against the communist power. He refused, however, and did not inform the authorities for reasons of an officer's honor. In August 1921 he was charged with participation in an antigovernment conspiracy and shot.

24 Tsvetaeva, Marina Ivanovna (1892-1941)
Russian poet, playwright and prose writer. She began to write poetry at the age of 6 and started

publishing books of poetry from the age of 16. Her first collection of poems, Evening Album (1910), shows a certain childlike frankness. Tsvetayeva was influenced by the Symbolists but did not join any literary group or movement.. She did not accept the Revolution of 1917 and went abroad in 1922 to join her husband. They lived in Berlin and Prague and finally settled in Paris in 1925. After years of financial difficulties she returned to the USSR in 1939. Her husband, daughter and sister were arrested, and Tsvetaeva could not withstand the isolation during evacuation in the war and hanged herself.

25 Babel, Isaac Emmanuilovich (1894-1940)

Russian author. Born in Odessa, he received a traditional religious as well as a secular education. During the Russian Civil War, he was political commissar of the First Cavalry Army and he fought for the Bolsheviks. From 1923 Babel devoted himself to writing plays, film scripts and narrative works. He drew on his experiences in the Russian cavalry and in Jewish life in Odessa. After 1929, he fell foul of the Russian literary establishment and published little. He was arrested by the Russian secret police in 1939 and completely vanished. His works were 'rehabilitated' after Stalin's death.

26 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People’s Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party’s control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

27 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.