Valentina Fidelman

Valentina Abramovna Fidelman
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Valentina Abramovna Fidelman is a unique woman.

Tiny in stature and surprisingly feminine, possessing a high and sonorous voice,

she can lead people like a skilled orchestra conductor and her belief in honesty and decency combined with unusual energy allows her to fulfill the most noble ideas.

She looks at you with the wide-open eyes of a child and radiates warmth during all the time you talk to her.

Involuntarily you straighten your back, as you see her moving with a stick along the corridor, ahead of young and blossoming women.

- **Family and childhood**

My grandmother on my father’s side, Tamara Vladimirovna Vul, nee Balakhovskaya, lost her husband early, and brought up seven children – three sons and four daughters – all by herself. Each of them received an education. They not only finished school, but also received a vocational training, a specialty. She lived in the Caucasus, in Vladikavkaz [capital of North Ossetia, Russia] and was born somewhere in Ukraine in the 1880s. I don’t know precisely, somewhere near Kiev. I was brought to Vladikavkaz at a very young age and I thought that they always lived there. But, most likely, I was born in the small town of Smela in Cherkassky region, and my grandmother also came from that place. It was Kiev province earlier, but now it is Cherkassky region.

Grandmother was respected by everyone in town. She finished Jewish school, and then received some other education, I don’t remember exactly. She was religious. She always helped the poor, in general she was a wonderful person, and I loved her madly. I consulted Grandmother literally on all issues. She was very clever; her advice was always reasonable. Grandmother spoke Russian. She dressed according to her time and was always very fastidious about her appearance.

She was married only once, her husband suddenly died, and she never got married again, devoting herself to her children and grandchildren. She didn’t tell me anything about her own childhood, but

mentioned that she was brought up in a very religious Jewish family, where all Jewish holidays and laws were observed. And she required that from us.

From Grandmother's home, I definitely remember Pesach. She had some sort of a special sideboard, where she kept the dishes used only at the time of Pesach. There were not only plates, but also knives, and every kind of utensils, everything to do with meals. The holidays were celebrated by all the family; everybody came, and, naturally, children participated as well. They were sticking around, helped themselves to various delicious things, not quite aware of which holiday it was, although Grandmother used to explain to us that it was in honor of the Jews' exodus from Egypt.

We also baked triangles for Purim and liked them very much, those with poppy-seed, we called them hamantashen – Haman's ears. I only remember those triangles, and in the morning, under our pillows, all of us found money – gifts were in the form of money. I don't remember other holidays. All manifestations of religious sentiment were persecuted in those times 1; we were warned. We lived, you could say, a double life. All that was done in our home, all these Jewish holidays, they couldn't have been taken out into the street or to school.

The house was on the bank of the river Terek, from the windows you could even see Kazbek [a large mountain range in the Caucasus]. Grandmother's house was one-storied, in Gorky Street, which was perpendicular to our street, we lived in Lenin Street. Grandmother had three rooms. One was for visitors, the second one – for children, and the third – for my adult aunts. In general, everyone lived together in that small one-storied house. Grandmother was very tidy and never hired anybody to help her around the house, just she and her children kept the household. She taught us tidiness very early. I remember she taught us from the age of eleven to maintain the cleanliness.

Granny was very sociable. She was on good terms with all the neighbors. And, to add a kind word about her: when Uncle Isaak married an Ossetian, Grandmother took her in her house, talked to her, taught her everything, and lived in perfect harmony with her. And all that in spite of the fact that it was a shame for the family that he married an Ossetian. That's what kind of a person she was.

Her maiden name was Balakhovskaya. I don't know when she got married. After her marriage she changed her surname to Vul. In the time of the Holocaust she lived in Vladikavkaz, which was not occupied by the Germans. She escaped the ordeal. She lived and died of the flu there in 1956. But up to the end of her life she had a clear mind, was clever and kind.

My maternal grandfather was from the family of Zaretsky, his full name was Zorakh Abramovich Zaretsky. People called him Zakhar Abramovich 2, or in the Jewish way - Zorakh Abramovich. He was born in 1870. The family was famous due to the fact that Great-great-grandfather was a 'Tsar Nikolai's soldier' 3, and, because of that, his relatives could live in St. Petersburg 4. They lived at 88 Nevsky Avenue, their windows faced the street. All of Grandfather's family lived there since 1929, and Grandfather Zorakh himself since 1927. He married my grandmother, whose photo I, unfortunately, was unable to find. As much as Grandfather was soft by nature, in the same degree Granny Faina was an imperious woman, and we, the children, didn't like her.

Mom took us to visit Granddad in the 1930s. Mostly it was in spring, probably around Pesach, by the time of my birthday, that's why I remember it. We enjoyed being there very much. Grandfather was a very respectable man. He was a rabbi. And in my childhood, when I came for a visit, I saw how he performed religious ceremonies. He sat down at a table, prayed, put on a striped tallit with tzitzit. Grandfather would pray, and if we misbehaved, he asked us to be quiet and listen to the prayer. We understood some Hebrew, but certainly, not all of it. And after that we were to kiss the tzitzit and say that we would be good and obedient children. Then Grandfather had breakfast and went to the synagogue, not every day, but quite frequently.

Also he gathered young people around himself – it was all forbidden then – and studied Jewish books with them. And he often told us about the Ten Commandments: don't steal, don't kill, be honest, and the like. He put on a solemn suit and a tie. He wore a kippah, and he had a hat with wide brims, like Hasids 5 have. When he was going to the synagogue, he put it on.

They lived in a communal apartment 6. Grandfather Zorakh was a sociable man. He had a huge room, probably around 50 square meters, the largest in the flat. Some musicians also lived in the apartment. I remember the violin was always somewhere around. Grandfather loved Jewish music and, among other things, spiritual music in general. With his neighbors he was always on good terms, Grandmother wasn't so kind with people. They, too, had a violin [like Grandmother Tamara in Vladikavkaz], I remember that violin well, and it survived until now. They had silver spoons, a silver ladle with Zaretsky's initials, and separately – the Pesach kosher utensils. Grandfather, certainly, didn't eat anything 'wrong,' only the kosher food. He would go to the synagogue, there were special men called shochetim there, who would cut poultry according to special rules, he ate only the kosher food and taught us to do the same.

He must have loved me more than all the other kids. I can say that I loved him very much too and was behind him in everything. By origin he must have been from Belarus, because he moved to Leningrad from Belarus [in 1927]. He must have come from some place near Kalinkovichi, because it was there that he married my grandmother. Her surname was Gorelik. She was a perfect housewife, looked after the house very strictly. She had eight children, four sons and four daughters [Klara, Maryasya, Avraam, Konstantin, Tasya, Fima, Asya and the smallest boy died in early childhood]. But she was very severe, with a difficult character. I communicated very little with her. Only when we went to our dacha 7 in Belarus in the summer, in Shokinki, on the bank of the Berezina River, we had to be together and talk: we went to the woods, gathered mushrooms; there were wonderful woods in the area before the war.

Grandmother Faina died in 1940, she was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Kontorskaya Street in Leningrad [St. Petersburg]. Almost all my relatives: Grandmother, Grandfather, my sister, Mom, Daddy and Uncle Abrasha, all are buried in Kontorskaya Street, near the synagogue. For all of them they read the burial service in the synagogue. And the custom was to cut off a small piece of the nearest relatives' clothes, daughter's and son's, for some reason.

On 31st August 1941, Grandfather Zorakh was sent to Orenburg [into evacuation]. It seems he lived a good life there [in 1938-1957 the city of Orenburg was called Chkalov]. And then, when he came back to Leningrad in 1945, he had a cerebral hemorrhage. When I arrived, he was paralyzed, and Aunt Maryasya looked after him. Granddad was also buried in Kontorskaya Street in 1946. There is a small monument there now – they weren't rich people; not poor, but certainly not rich.

My mother, Klara Zakharovna, they also called her Chayusya in the Jewish way, was, like Granddad, a kind, good and sympathetic person. She was born in 1906 and died in 1987. She is buried beside my sister Tsilya. Mom studied, as she told me, in a Jewish school, there were only four grades there. Rather early, at 16 years of age, she was engaged to my father, so she probably studied at school until she turned 16. They spoke only Yiddish at home, and used Russian only when talking to children and neighbors. Both languages were spoken.

During World War I [1914-1918], Daddy stayed in their house in Belarus for some time [that is, being a soldier, was quartered in their house]. He was a medical assistant. Grandmother had given him an education. He finished a Medical Assistants School. He liked Mom very much, and they became engaged. They got acquainted in my mother's house, where he stayed. They got married in the synagogue, already in St. Petersburg; Grandfather ordered them to come here and there was a real wedding ceremony. They received a marriage certificate in Hebrew or Yiddish, I don't know exactly, in the synagogue. Daddy was born in 1898. She was 18, and he was 26. And then, because Grandmother lived in Vladikavkaz, they moved there after my birth.

In Vladikavkaz we had one half of a house, a one-storied building, all houses were basically one-storied there. Three good rooms: a nursery, a dining room and the bedroom for parents. The kitchen was shared with the neighbors. The neighbors were under supervision, because he was a former White Army 8 soldier and she was a teacher, so they were often visited by the NKVD 9. We had very good relations with our neighbors.

In the courtyard there was a front garden with trees and acacia. I remember it well. We, the children, used to climb and eat it, the white acacia – it was very tasty. There were other bushes and garden flowers. Mom loved gardening very much. We lived not without troubles, but I think we could make ends meet. My sister [Tsitsilia] was three years older than I was, she was born in 1924, and I – in 1927, and ten years later my brother Vladimir was born there, in Vladikavkaz [1937].

Daddy was an actor by nature; he acted in the national Ossetian Theater in Vladikavkaz. He was companionable and emotional, while Mom was silent, quiet. I, probably, took after my father. I always remember Father in a good mood, he was always affable to people, he had a very good voice; he sang and participated in Jewish performances. The theater was located in Stalin Avenue, in the center. And they staged various plays, Russian, Ossetian and Jewish. My recollections are obscure, I was a little girl then, but I attended plays with pleasure, I saw all those performances. Daddy knew several languages: Ossetian, Armenian, Georgian and naturally Yiddish. And in general he was a wonderful man. He also sang at home.

My parents basically led a secular life, traditions were only observed at Grandmother's home. With my parents we used to celebrate the Soviet holidays. We had an Armenian family visiting us, we put up a huge table right in the courtyard, which was surrounded by a fence. Everyone who wished, sat down at that table, usually all the neighbors, Daddy sang, and it was always a lot of fun.

Daddy was transferred to Leningrad in 1939. He was a railway man, and from the North-Ossetia Railway he was transferred to the October Railway [the second longest after the Moscow railway and the first railway line in Russia], just before the war with the Finns [1939-1940] 11. We exchanged our apartment for a room in Leningrad in Razyezhaya Street. Later Daddy exchanged the room in Razyezhaya for an apartment in Nevsky Prospekt.

I became independent too early, and as my parents expected a boy, I played not as much with girls, as with boys, and Daddy encouraged that. We played right in the street, and they all obeyed me. We fought street against street. We had rich neighbors, and now I can't believe that I could climb over roofs and steal apples from them and distribute them among poor kids. There were a lot of poor Ossetians, Russians, Jews, all sorts of nationalities. We had no concept of nationality; I didn't know what I was. There was no anti-Semitism in the Caucasus, we were true internationalists, and there were both Armenians and Georgians in our courtyard. But in the house of Grandmother Tamara the situation was completely different. Grandma observed all traditions and accustomed us to Jewish life.

I studied in an ordinary school in the Caucasus up to the fifth grade, and when in 1939 we moved to Leningrad, I went to the fifth grade in Leningrad. My favorite subjects were natural sciences and literature. I was not so fond of mathematics. I was a good pupil, getting good and excellent marks. I possessed a good voice, and the teacher of singing, Antonina Kharitonovna, a very intelligent woman, made me sing solo. She advised me to enter some children cultural school. I sang in a chorus until the outbreak of war 11.

Almost all children in our courtyard were my friends. I always liked people as much as my father did, I never offended anybody, and people liked to be my friends. I remember, in the sixth grade, in 1941, I knew many boys, with whom I went out, in particular, opposite the cinema, I don't know, what it is called now. There was a small garden there, where we met. ['Pravda' cinema was situated in Zagorodny Avenue in the center of St. Petersburg]. We were just friends, having normal human relations. I liked to dress well. Mom sewed well, and I liked to wear tight dresses, I was thin. I always wore printed cotton dresses.

- **In evacuation**

We survived until 1942, in the hungriest times 12, thanks to my Uncle Kostya. His family was transferred to Leningrad from the pre-Baltic area. He would bring us loafs of bread and other food. We survived and were evacuated. There was a fear that Leningrad would be surrendered, so the order was issued to take away all the children. Mom didn't want to stay without her kids, and said, 'Only if I go with them.' And we, together with Mom, were evacuated to Sverdlovsk region, near Pyshminsky highway, I remember it well. I even remember the street where we lived in a barrack. It was the end of June 1942 – I was 14 years old, Mother – 36.

My father worked since we moved to Leningrad in 1939, at the Kirov factory [one of the biggest machine building and metallurgy enterprises of the former USSR] as a 'voyenpred' [military representative], not really in his field of specialization. They were making tanks and other military equipment there. And before this equipment got to the front, it was to pass the military quality control. And when the war began, he left for the irregular army near Luga [town in Leningrad region, from 1941-1945 a place of active military operations] and fought there. Many people were encircled there, but he, thank God, stayed alive by a miracle.

In Sverdlovsk [today Ekaterinburg] I finished the Medical Assistants School, I entered it in 1943, and graduated in 1945. And for Tsilya, Mom rented a room, and she lived independently and was a student of the Pedagogical Institute in Sverdlovsk. She was brought up an honest and respectable person and was very clever. She received only excellent marks. After graduation from the institute

she was a teacher, taught literature and the Russian language, and when they returned from evacuation in 1946, she was a teacher in Koltushy [a small town East of Leningrad]. It was a time of starvation and some teachers used to steal from the children, and she struggled against it, put up a fight. She had a heart attack and died in 1950, very young.

My brother, Vladimir Abramovich Vul, was born in 1937 in Vladikavkaz. My brother is alive, but he is seriously ill. He lost his first son. The boy left for school once, in his tenth grade, and didn't return. He was tripped up, fell down and had his abdominal aorta ruptured. They couldn't rescue him, and the boy died. My brother had a heart attack. And recently he endured a very serious oncological operation of the intestines. He is sick, but both he and I have a very strong will. We probably inherited it from our father. He is an invalid of the second class, but he still teaches in a technical institute, and he has a doctor's degree 13.
His son, Vitaly, born in 1980, is a student at the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University.

We didn't return from evacuation all at once. In Leningrad there was an official by the name of Popkov [chairman of the Leningrad City Council of People's Deputies, subjected to repressions in 1952]. I wrote a letter to him: 'I implore you, I want to restore my city. Send me a summons, please!' [Summons – a document authorizing a person to enter the post-blockade Leningrad] And in 1945 I received the summons and arrived in Leningrad. In May I turned 18, and in September I arrived, and got a job as a medical assistant in the factory named after Plekhanov. After work we used to clean and restore the city all together.

There was no information from Daddy. When I arrived in 1945, I learned that he was wounded. He continued to work at the factory, and only later he worked as a medical assistant. In 1946 we met. He accidentally found out, that I arrived in Leningrad, when he visited Aunt Maryasya, who lived at 80 Nevsky Avenue. From her he learned that I was in Leningrad. Her Russian name was Marusya, but really she was Maryasya Zakharovna. She was the second sister after Mom, born in 1907.

When I arrived, I lived about half a year with her. She didn't work, her husband had just come back from the war. They had a son, but I wasn't especially close with him. They lived quite well financially. Aunt Maryasya helped all poor Jews, there was a whole concourse of Jews in their home. For some reason everybody knew her and she helped everyone out financially, fed them dinners. In 1946 all our family arrived from evacuation, that is, my sister, brother and Mom, and they also were summoned to Leningrad.

Uncle Kostya also had his family back, they, too, had been evacuated. They went through all the basic hardships of the war in Leningrad, but as there was the order to take away all children, they were evacuated. They were in Siberia, and all the family returned, and they continued to live in Leningrad. After the war he worked in a grocery warehouse, as he had no education, he was just a sailor. We called him this way too – Kostya, the seaman. He was very cheerful and fanciful. He served in the merchant fleet, and then in the coast defense of Leningrad. But his regular occupation was sailor in merchant marine; he traveled everywhere you could think of.

His wife Pasha, and their children Valya and Felix Zaretsky, who inherited Grandfather's surname, left for Germany. I maintain relations with them, when they come visit, not often though. Felix has a talented son, Daniel Zaretsky, he is frequently spoken about, and he is a well-known pianist. But he didn't leave for Germany, he travels all over the world, gives concerts. He's still very young, not

older than 25. I went to listen to his concert once in the Philharmonic Society. Of course, he performed tremendously, perfectly.

Asya and Tasya were my Mom's sisters. Asya was the youngest, and Tasya was born after Maryasya. They all bear the name Zaretsky, they are Grandfather's daughters. They were four: Asya, Tasya, Maryasya and my mother. Asya worked as a librarian in the Palace of Arts in Nevsky Avenue, then [in the 1950s] referred to as the House of Arts. There I met Simonov [a Soviet actor, people's actor of the USSR], and many other prominent actors, who came to see her. They all respected her. She knew the English language, was very gifted. Her daughter lived here. In honor of my grandmother she was named Inna Zaretsky.

So Aunt Asya and Aunt Maryasya were librarians, and Tasya worked as a booking office cashier at the Moscow railway station. There she got acquainted with her Russian husband. Her father 'crossed her out of the list' [disowned her] after she married a Russian.

Uncle Ruvim, my father's brother, came to visit Grandmother Tamara in Vladikavkaz; he lived in Leningrad. My uncle received a military education, was at the front, and when he arrived on leave in Leningrad he was killed at the railway station. It was in 1942. A bomb exploded there. I think it was at the Moscow railway station, but I can't say for sure. That's how he died. He was a military, wore those strips, there were no shoulder straps then. He was a senior lieutenant.

All my relatives on the side of Grandmother Faina, my Leningrad grandmother, the wife of Grandfather Zorakh, died during the blockade and are buried in Piskarevsky cemetery. [Piskarevsky cemetery: A memorial cemetery, the biggest place of mass burial of Leningrad citizens who died of starvation and were killed during the blockade of Leningrad, 1941-1944, and soldiers of the Leningrad front who perished in World War II. Located in the north-east of the city near Piskarevka railway station, thus the name.]

Out of them I remember a small elderly lady, called Feiga. She was very tender and kind, of a very small height, and that's why I called her 'the small grandmother.' We met when I came to Leningrad [in the 1930s]. And then, later, we didn't communicate any more. I was about seven years old then. They lived at 16 Zagorodny Avenue, near the post-office. When Aunt Maryasya was alive, she knew their grave, and she had shown it to me. And only this year I skipped going to Piskarevka, because of my leg, otherwise I go there every year.

Pyotr Mikhailovich Balakhovsky is the son of Grandmother Tamara's brother. He is a war veteran, a very courageous and kind man. When we had hard times after my sister died, and we were suffering a lot, he tried his best to help. A very open-hearted person. He was at the front, and his family was here and then they were evacuated. His wife was a rather severe woman and didn't like her relatives, so we didn't communicate with her. They lived in Leningrad, in the Kirovsky district. They had a daughter. But I don't know anything about their history. We loved Pyotr Mikhailovich, he often came to visit us, but always alone, already after the war. He had the rank of major. He died of brain hemorrhage.

Uncle Fima's [one of Grandfather Zaretsky's sons] first wife, Lyuba, was a dentist. In 1941 she gave birth to a girl, and Mom wrote to her: 'Lyubochka, please come, I'll help you!' And she went right when the war began in 1941. And she was executed in Babi Yar 14 together with her baby; they were buried alive. Such a horrible destiny.

Uncle Fima even went to see Stalin after that. He then worked at the Kirov factory, on Pyshminsky highway, where they were producing ‘Katyushas’ [the commonly accepted name for a very powerful rocket offensive system developed in the years of Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union]. He went to Moscow from Sverdlovsk [Kirov factory and other Soviet plants were evacuated to Central and Eastern Russia during the war], to see Stalin and told him, ‘I want to be at the front, to avenge my wife and child.’ Stalin answered, ‘No, you will work on Katyusha!’ And later, after he returned to Leningrad, he went to revive the collective farms 15. He was married for the second time then. So he left somewhere, lost what was left of his health, and died in 1953 of brain hemorrhage.

Lyudmila Efimovna [Uncle Fima’s daughter from his second marriage], and her sons, Zhenechka and Edik, already adults, are now in Australia, they have their own house in Melbourne. The sons, certainly, don’t know Russian: they speak only English. She married a Jew, but a lazy one, who didn’t want to work, and she had to support her family all by herself in Australia. She left in 1970. Her aunt was there by then – her mother’s sister. Nobody was allowed to leave, only if one had close relatives there. But her aunt was there, so they were permitted to emigrate. And Lyudmila’s brother, Zorik, named in honor of Grandfather Zorakh Zaretsky, is married to a Russian. They have left for Germany. He is not writing us, I don’t know anything about them.

- **Life after the war**

After the war we lived at 74 Nevsky Avenue, on the fourth floor, opposite the ‘Titan’ cinema, our windows were facing it. [movie theater focusing on historical films, a part of the entertainment company ‘Titan.’ The building was bought by merchant K. P. Palkin in 1871, rebuilt and extended, and accommodated a restaurant. In the same building from 1873 the printing house of A. I. Granshel was located, publishing, among others, ‘The Civilian’ magazine, edited by F. M. Dostoevsky] There I spent my student years. We all went for walks along the Nevsky Avenue.

I worked at a factory for about one year. There were very good people there, and one engineer said, ‘Valya, you are so gifted, you should go to university.’ I answered him, ‘It will be very difficult, because the war has just ended, it’s 1947, lots of young people are eager to enter university.’ I passed all entrance exams with excellent marks, however strange it may seem, and entered the Pediatric Institute, which I graduated from with specialization as a pediatrician. Because I followed in my father’s footsteps…

At the preparatory courses in my institute in 1947 I got acquainted with my very good friend Maya Gross. I had an open dress, almost all my back open, and she wrote on my back (we were not allowed to talk at lectures): ‘What’s your name?’ Someone asked me, ‘Do you know, what is written on your back?’ I said, ‘No, I don’t.’ – ‘That girl asks, what is your name, she likes you so much.’ That’s how our friendship began. Maya was very beautiful. She had dark blue eyes, black curly hair, she was slim and tall.

Now Maya is in Germany, in Cologne, living somewhere in the suburbs, with a park nearby and a lake, she writes that she is going for walks there. She has found some Jewish friends. There is a synagogue there, which she visits. She writes about it in her letters. She left in 1999. I personally don’t want to go, after so many Jews died in the war, I consider it a crime, and I keep telling so to all my relatives, my cousins [Valentin and Felix Zaretsky], who are in Germany. I maintain that it is

a crime against our nation to live in Germany. In spite of all the difficulties we encounter here… I frequently receive letters from Maya, I am going to answer her again closer to 8th March [International Women's Day] to congratulate her. She is a wonderful person, from a good Jewish family.

In 1947 I was visiting my grandmother [Tamara] in the Caucasus. Once, when I had just come from a walk, I saw a boy – a Greek boy – who I met on the train. He declared his love to me, and I said, 'All right, let's go to the Terek, and if you swim across the Terek in the evening, then I'll believe that you are really in love with me.' That's what kind of girl I was. He swam across the Terek, I was very impressed, but when I came home to Grandmother's house I stopped in the doorway. There was my mom sitting there in the company of a young man, very handsome, blue-eyed, blond, very attractive, with a high forehead. I was stuck there in the doorway and fell in love with him literally from the first glance.

We dated for one year. His mother wanted us to get married. And he was a student of the Aviation Institute, and came to the Caucasus to have a rest at his mom's home. His mother, whose name was Bratislava, knew my grandmother very well. Bratislava was a dressmaker and sewed for them. And that was how we met. We had an ordinary secular wedding. He was born in Donbass, but his family moved to another place when he was just a small boy. He suffered from famine in childhood 16, it was in 1933, and there was something wrong with food supplies there. During the war they left for Frunze [today Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan]. At the age of 16 he finished the ninth and tenth grades of school as an external student and went to another town to enter an institute.

We got married in 1948. We had no place to live, our room on Nevsky Avenue was very small, and we rented apartments for almost ten years. Our family life was very difficult. We got married not having any accommodation, we didn't even have a room, but we loved each other. He was born in 1927 like me, only he was born in January and I in May. He was studying at the Aviation Institute, he was a very capable, I would even say, a talented boy.

Because he was a very respectable and honest person, he was expelled from the fourth year of the institute. He voted against the director. The director was an awful man, he didn't understand the students, there was a voting, and when he voted 'against,' he was 'dismissed from the institute for ideological degeneration.' Those were difficult years. Then he entered the correspondence department of the Technological Institute and later graduated from the Technological Institute. He worked and studied at the same time. He had a good job, he worked as an engineer although he had no diploma at first, but he was very talented.

He worked in Pavlov Street, where there was a secret defense factory, exactly in his field of expertise – operating airplanes and ships. And, indeed, he could pursue a good professional career. At the age of 26, he was already the chief of laboratory. He developed new planes, and his aircraft never had been in wrecks or catastrophes. He was always away on business trips, but this could have been beneficial for our life. 'Separation is the same for love, as wind is for fire, it blows out small love, but it heats up the big one!' and that's exactly the way it was with our love – he came from business trips, and our life began anew.

Only when our daughter turned ten, and our marriage was twelve years old, did we receive a room. Later he worked in a huge institute near Smolny [the historically significant architectural complex, accommodating the St. Petersburg Administration]. It was also a secret research institution,

something to do with radio broadcasting. When the director told him, ‘Fidelman, you are allotted an apartment,’ he answered, ‘No, not everyone in my laboratory has apartments, a room will be enough for me.’ And we were happy, that we received a room in Moscow Avenue.

He felt unwell when he flew on his last assignment in 1990. The guys from the town of Monino near Moscow who were testing the new equipment didn’t want to fly, they told him, ‘We are not going without you.’ I dissuaded him, but he is a man of action, like me. He said, ‘You wouldn’t have refused, would you? I can’t refuse, either.’ And they departed. He went to work there and felt very sick. He had an acute heart attack with heavy consequences. To put it briefly, in 1993 he still helped a little bit, worked with his guys, but was at once assigned to the second disability group, and allotted an invalidity pension. Being retired, he decided to study Hebrew at home, using only textbooks. Until now Abram Solomonovich can read Hebrew with the help of a dictionary.

Our daughter was born in 1950. Her name is Elena Abramovna Fidelman. She took entrance exams at several universities at once, the Institute of Krupskaya and the Theater Institute. It was very difficult to enter, only those who had profitable connections or a lot of money had no problem with that. But, eventually, she passed the examinations and was admitted to the theater faculty in Mokhovaya Street [famous street in the center of St. Petersburg]. Then Elena worked in a theater museum, and later she found a job in a travel agency as a guide. She liked that work very much, she constantly improved her knowledge, and now it’s 20 years that she’s been working as a guide.

Of course, it’s hard work, because she works for the owners, not independently. She carries out excursions to Pavlovsk, Pushkin and Petrodvorets [towns in Leningrad region, famous for their parks and palaces] and doesn’t receive so much money. But she does not think that money is the main thing, in our family spiritual life has always been the focus: to read more, to learn more, to see more. So she works with her heart. Besides, she works for SOBES [the municipal department of social security]: she helps elderly ladies, brings them meals and so on. They pay her with their love.

Elena was married, but they got divorced, and now we live together. Now we live in the area of Courage Square [The square is named in honor of defenders of the blockaded Leningrad], in Shatelen Street, opposite the Television Institute.

In 1954 I was assigned 17 the post of pediatrician doctor at the hospital of Bakhchisarai district of the Crimea [today Ukraine]. After graduation from the institute I worked there [1954-1955]. One nurse was a very unprincipled and careless worker there. Instead of doing normal inoculations, for example against diphtheria, she used half a doze. I caught her doing that. She was fired.

After that I worked as a pediatrician in Petroslavyanskaya Hospital [1955-1962], and not only as a pediatrician, I carried out various duties. Once, I even had to stop a train: the state farm, in which I worked, was far from the railway, about 1.5 kilometers and you had to go on foot, and this girl had an acute appendicitis. I was called on the phone and asked, ‘Valentina Abramovna, please come!’ so I quickly jumped into a horse-cart and went to the patient. And in 1962 I was directed to improvement courses on children psychiatry in Kolpino [today a district of St. Petersburg], and later, from 1963, I started working with the Kolpino hospital.

I retired rather early, at 57 years of age. The reason for that is the following. I was very demanding towards myself. While at work, I frequently communicated with the Bekhterev Institute,

participated in all conferences, subscribed to numerous magazines, newspapers, there was a magazine called ‘Psychiatry and Neurology,’ for instance. In general, I preferred to be in the center of all events to provide the best possible help to my patients. While I could do all these things, I worked.

But at 57 I felt, that I wasn’t fit enough any more, that I should better quit and yield to the younger ones. The chief doctor was very surprised to hear that and didn’t believe that I was leaving the job. And I told him, ‘All right, I’m no longer the doctor who could handle anything.’ I conceded the position to a young, talented girl, Svetlana by name. When I treated her like a little girl, she used to repeat, ‘Valentina Abramovna, I will surely be a doctor like you!’ And then I met her, she also finished the Pediatric Institute and I literally enticed her to psychiatry. I told her, ‘You are sincere and kind. And in psychiatry that is exactly what you need, compassion to the diseased children and their parents.’ And now she is the head doctor in Kolpino district, where I worked, a perfect doctor.

In 1959 I was elected a deputy of the district council. As a deputy I did everything I could. People remember me until now, and I am happy. I visit the Kolpino district with an open heart and I can look everyone in the eyes. In those years we heard nothing of bribes, it seemed awful to us. We were educated differently in the Pediatric Institute. We worked conscientiously, honestly, not like deputies work now. When I was a deputy, I was the first to organize psychiatric service for children in Kolpino district. There wasn’t anything like that there before.

Now I am a volunteer of the Jewish Charitable Center ‘Hesed Avraham’ 18, giving out parcels in the department of humanitarian aid. Very frequently I attend lectures on the history of the Jewish people in Hesed. But I don’t go to the synagogue; I’m satisfied with the secular communication in Hesed. My God is in my soul.

- **Glossary:**

1 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.

2 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.

3 Nikolai’s army

Soldier of the tsarist army during the reign of Nicholas I when the draft lasted for 25 years.

4 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

5 Hasid

Follower of the Hasidic movement, a 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.

6 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.

7 Dacha

Country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

8 Whites (White Army)

Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were

patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

9 NKVD

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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.

13 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually

took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

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 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.

16 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.

17 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.

18 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical

and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.