

# Galina Natarevich

Galina Borisovna Natarevich

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Russia

Interviewer: Anna Nerush

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*Fragile and graceful, affable and hospitable – these are just the external characteristics of the artist Galina Borisovna Natarevich – the daughter of a popular ballet dancer of the glorious Mariinsky (then Kirovsky) theater in pre-war and post-war Leningrad, Genrietta Raitsykh. But the main and surprising feature of Galina Borisovna is her love of life and her power of spirit. Life has challenged her with enormous hardships that few people ever encounter.*

*By telling the dramatic story of her beloved family in a lively and figurative way, Galina Borisovna feels her inseparable links with it again and again. For 30 years Galina has courageously born the weight of cares, looking after her disabled son. Thanks to her, Iliya has finished school. He is incurably sick.*

*When you see them together, you understand how deep and really inexhaustible the concept of motherhood is. The family lives in absolute poverty. Their son is disabled, and they have no means not only for medical treatment, but also even for decent food. They live in a two-room apartment in Nevsky Avenue, in a prestigious location.*

*The house has been occupied by commercial companies who approach them with proposals to sell their apartment and move to a less fashionable area on the outskirts of the city. But they wouldn't give up, because they like the place and are used to it. That's the kind of story this is.*

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- **My family**

I, Galina Borisovna Natarevich, was born in evacuation in the city of Molotov [today Perm] in 1941. I never saw my father, Boris Leibovich Zilber, as he was killed in 1942 at the front. My mom, Genrietta Iosifovna Raitsykh, became a widow at the age of 23. My maiden name is Zilber. The history of my family is very rich in every respect. The archive of our family survived by a miracle. It really is astonishing, because the war lasted for four years [1](#) and the documents were taken as far as Molotov. And if they had been left in Leningrad [today St. Petersburg], they would surely have been burnt in the furnace, because people had to burn furniture and other things to keep warm [2](#).

The father of my mother's father, and mother of my mother's father, that is, my great-grandfather and great-grandmother, were Lazar Grigorievich Raitsykh and Hanna Iosifovna Raitsykh. The Raitsykh family comes from Baku [today Azerbaijan], and Hanna's family – from Kharkov [today Ukraine]. The father of my mother's mother, and mother of my mother's mother, my great-grandfather and great-grandmother on the other side – Yankel and Shifra Shamesh – came from Vilno [today Vilnius in Lithuania].

My maternal great-grandfather Lazar Grigorievich married Grandmother Hanna after he completed his service in the army, against his mother's will: her daughters weren't married yet, and in Jewish families it was customary to marry off daughters first, and only then the sons could get married. A family quarrel arose, Lazar's mother being very disappointed by his decision to get married. He died in 1932 at the age of 82.

Lazar Grigorievich Raitsykh was born in 1850 in Temirkhan-Sura in the Northern Caucasus. For those times, he was quite an educated man, technically competent and literate in Russian. But, nevertheless, he was an Orthodox Jew and observed absolutely all Jewish customs. Lazar served in the imperial army, in engineering troops. When he was demobilized, he mastered the profession of building contractor in oil-fields and conducted some kind of research into oil deposits.

Lazar Grigorievich had three brothers and three sisters. Two brothers, Avraam and Iosif, died during the revolution in Petrograd [today St. Petersburg] [3](#). And the youngest brother, Leon, never married and lived the life of a bachelor in the family of his sister Rosa. Their sister Anna immigrated before 1917 with her husband and son to New York. Sister Nadya died early, and left a daughter, also Nadya by name; Grandmother Hanna Iosifovna brought her up. Nadya worked as a nurse, was at the front during the war, and after the war returned to Leningrad. Sister Rosa was mentally disabled, her descendants now live in Israel.

My maternal great-grandmother, Lazar Grigorievich's wife, Hanna Iosifovna Raitsykh, was born in Astrakhan in the middle of the 19th century. Hanna was completely illiterate, uneducated, spoke poor Russian, basically spoke Yiddish, but observed all Jewish traditions very accurately. For instance, if they had meat for dinner, she wouldn't let herself eat ice-cream, which she loved very much, earlier than four hours after that. She was patiently waiting those four hours, because any other conduct was prohibited. Hanna was a housewife and had a very imperious character. After revolutionary events in Baku in the 1920s, all the family moved from a good apartment to another, worse one. It was a hard blow for Hanna, she fell ill and soon died in 1924 in Baku.

Their son, Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, married the daughter of Shifra and Yankel Shamesh, Sara Yankelevna Shamesh.

The other of my maternal great-grandmothers, Shifra Shamesh – unfortunately I don't know her patronymic – was a native of Lithuania, she came from Vilno. She lived in Kharkov and was married twice. She had children both from her first and from her second marriages. In the second marriage she had two daughters, my grandmother Sara Yankelevna and her sister Reizl Yankelevna. Shifra was an extremely religious woman and observed all Jewish customs. For example, as soon as she got married, her own hair was shaved off and she wore a wig ever after.

Shifra was going to marry a man named Yankel, but he was taken away as a soldier for as long as 25 years [4](#), and so she married another man. Yankel, having returned from his service earlier – for

what reason I don't know – also got married. But soon Shifra's husband died, and at the same time Yankel's wife died, and they got together again. A boy was born to them. And Grandfather was a tough man, and he declared, that if she didn't bear him any girls, he would divorce her. And then she prayed zealously, and God sent her a girl, and later another one. One of their daughters was my grandmother, Sara Yankelevna Shamesh.

Shifra wasn't a housewife, because she had to care about our daily bread. Her husband Yankel was a man of a very difficult nature, and besides, that service in the army made him into a lover of drink, he played at weddings, and probably earned some money this way, but he would immediately drink off everything he earned. Therefore Shifra had to arrange a pawn shop right in her house and in this way she managed to feed their children. It was a very difficult situation. Shifra knitted herself, and I think we even have the leftovers of that lace somewhere.

By the way, Yankel adored Dostoevsky [5](#), and read his books at night. She would come into the bedroom and say, 'Meine student, please stop burning away the kerosene!' Yes, Shifra was like an old Dostoevsky lady – the money-lender, but what could she do? She had to feed her family. In general, it was a risky enterprise. [Editor's note: She could actually speak the two languages and this phrase was said partly in Russian and partly in Yiddish. Since the 1930s the Jewish schools were closed in the territory of the Soviet Union, and several generations of Jews had no chance to study Yiddish in the regular, methodical way, accepted in schools. They only knew the conversational variant of Yiddish, used in everyday life. That's why their speech was so compilative and ugly at times, consisting of words in Russian, German and Yiddish. It might be difficult to understand in Europe and the USA, where Jews were able to obtain education in their native language, but this is a specific feature in the life of Jews in the Soviet Union.]

I know hardly anything about my great-grandfather on my father's side, Gdaliy Dombrovsky. He was a very rich man, an owner of steamships, but I don't know when – all his steamships sunk and he went bankrupt. My great-grandmother on my father's side, Augusta Borisovna Dombrovskaya, came from Tomsk. I don't know when she was born, or when she died. She was a very educated lady, knew several foreign languages, and she left Tomsk right after the revolution with her children and headed for Moscow, where, as I was told, she became one of the secretaries of Sverdlov [Sverdlov, Yakov (1885-1919): one of the leaders of the Communist Party of the USSR].

My grandfather on my mother's side, Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, was born in 1885 in Astrakhan. It is a region on the Caspian Sea, near Baku. As a grandson of a Nikolai's soldier he was granted a delay from military service and many other privileges, because a standard term of service in the imperial army was 25 years.

By the age of 22 Iosif finished the grammar school named after Alexander III in Baku. But it took him some effort to graduate, he encountered big problems there. Once he asked why he had received a mark lower than he actually deserved, and he was told that he was a bloody Yid. And he was ready to fight with the offender. He was expelled and had to go to Tiflis [today Tbilisi, Georgia], to some Georgian Duke, who supervised all the education in that region, to ask, to implore, and to submit an application on his reinstating in that grammar school. He had to pass many examinations as an external student, not attending lectures. Therefore his education was a little bit stretched out in time.

However, by 1907-08, all these problems were resolved. He had finished the grammar school, and he was even permitted to go abroad, where he was hoping to obtain university education. The Baku municipal council approved his departure, and the head of administration had signed the appropriate certificate in the Yiddish language, for which you were supposed to pay a tax of 75 kopecks back then.

In 1908, Iosif entered the University in Munich. He graduated from the medical faculty of that university, attended lectures in other universities besides Munich, in particular, the University in Halle and the Berlin University. Among other lectures, he attended those of Professor Virhoff, a well-known scientist in the medical circles. Iosif's thesis was typed and published in German, a language he knew perfectly, and his diploma was a very significant work. And in spite of the fact that he had received his education in a solid European university, Iosif returned from Munich to Petrograd, where he was assigned to carry out medical service in the hospital of Prince Oldenburgsky.

In 1917 he married Sara Yankelevna Shamesh in Petrograd, and left with her for Baku. Therefrom he went to pass examinations in Kharkov to obtain a degree of an ordinary doctor [the first degree of medical doctor in those years in Russia]. He later received a rank of therapist in Kharkov, and returned to Baku. There Iosif supervised commodity warehouses, performing the duties of a sanitary doctor, examining the goods that were transported from Baku and back, for signs of any infections. He sometimes went to Persia with his wife. In summer, as a rule, Iosif went for medical practice to Azerbaijan and Khasavyurt [North Caucasus].

Alongside working as a sanitary doctor, he was also in charge of reception of patients. As he was a therapist, people of different nationalities came to see him. Grandfather spoke Azeri and Armenian. Azeris [being Muslim], as well as Jews, are prohibited to eat pork. Among them were tuberculosis patients and Granddad had to treat them somehow, and there were no medicines then, and it was necessary to give the patients fat food, not only mutton. Grandfather would make pork balls and give these to them, not telling them what they were eating. God forbid them from finding out what kind of medicine that was! So he tried to treat them by and large. But afterwards, when one patient had almost recovered, Grandfather confessed to him, and they say he felt sick and vomited. I don't know, if it's true or not. But anyway, there was such a story.

Grandfather had been ill with typhoid fever in 1919 and after that he suffered of short breath, weakness, chronic complicated inflammation of lungs and kidneys, as well as urinary bladder, obesity of the heart and a general corpulence. Due to his illness he was given the following diagnosis: valid for rear service, not valid for active military service. How Grandfather managed to survive. I don't know how because very many people died from typhus back then, there were no appropriate medicines.

He was a very artistic, pliant man, he danced easily, despite of his corpulence, and was an easy-going man in general. He was invited to act in a movie. Films were silent then. He was cast in the role of a groom in a silent movie called 'In the Name of God,' shot in Baku in 1926. Then, after he moved to Leningrad, before the war, he acted in two films: 'Peter the First' and 'The Girl Sets off for a Rendezvous.'

During his whole life Grandfather was a very religious man. The Soviet power was officially established in Baku in 1922. Observation of all customs - celebrating of Pesach and Rosh Hashanah

- was permitted, but was supposed to be done privately, in someone's apartment [7](#). It was allowed to visit the synagogue. But it wasn't encouraged. I remember very well, that Grandfather used to put on a silk hat, a kippah, when he prayed. In everyday life he didn't wear a kippah, as far as I remember, because it would have given away his Jewishness to other people, and this was in the Soviet times. He was a medical doctor and worked among atheists.

They celebrated Pesach and Rosh Hashanah in our house, and read the Haggadah. On Pesach, he always performed the seder. It was such a long prayer, and he necessarily wore a kippah. Some prayer books were kept in our family for a long period, but after Grandfather's death in 1952 Mom handed them all over to the synagogue. If she had known Hebrew and could have read prayers herself, she would have kept them, but she decided that it would be more appropriate to give them to the synagogue, so that people who really knew Hebrew and could pray in Hebrew, as it should be done, could use them.

In 1932, when my mother, Genrietta Iosifovna was 14, she moved with Grandmother Sara from Baku to Leningrad to study ballet. Grandfather Iosif stayed in Baku for a while. But Grandmother Sara insisted on his coming over. I regard it wholly as my Grandmother Sara's merit that she and my mom moved to St. Petersburg. It was the dream of her life to live in Petrograd, in St. Petersburg. But Iosif was a real Baku resident, all his roots were there, he didn't want to leave at all. Grandmother pulled him out all the same, with all his roots. And he moved.

If my grandfather had stayed in Baku, when Bagirov came to power at the end of the 1930s, he certainly would have been executed. Bagirov was the chief of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Caucasus in general and Baku in particular. Bagirov had subjected many of Grandfather's friends to repressions. Grandfather had many friends, in particular a lawyer by the name of Mikhtibek, an Azeri. That Mikhtibek perished.

In Leningrad Iosif wasn't touched by the repressions, because his life wasn't interesting to anybody any more. First thing, he was already disabled, and wasn't employed in the state service. He had a private practice as a doctor in Leningrad before the war; he was allowed to do it. He personally didn't suffer in any way before the war. And after the war he was already a completely sick person. He left with his family for evacuation to Molotov [today Perm], returned to Leningrad in 1944 and died in 1952. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Leningrad.

My maternal grandmother, Sara Yankelevna Shamesh, was born in 1887 in Kharkov in Ukraine. She had received an education there, became an obstetrician, or a midwife, as they used to say then. But as a medical nurse she could also work in other fields. She aspired to education, attended language courses and accounting courses. She passed examinations, took a great interest in Marxism, and was a member of a Marxist circle, where they read 'The Capital,' and where they were supposed to keep revolutionary leaflets. In general she was involved in the revolutionary life of Kharkov, since Kharkov was an industrial city, and there was a strong revolutionary mood there.

If it hadn't been for the intervention of her mother, Grandmother would probably have had a different fate. Her mother had literally implored her to quit that infatuation with Marxism, and Grandmother got rid of it after all. Grandmother definitely went to the synagogue. Still in Kharkov, as it was customary, she was taught Judaism. A teacher of Jewish traditions and Hebrew language used to come to their house, and he treated her rather harshly. Whenever her answers were incorrect, he used to batter her, and Grandmother was a brisk girl, she would reply, 'Why are you



fighting?!' And at that time her father was praying. And during prayer you are not allowed to talk. And only when he'd finished, he would turn and ask, 'Who is fighting, what's the matter, who is fighting?!'

And then Sara left Kharkov for Petrograd, though her father and mother, her sister and brothers tried very hard to talk her out of that decision. She left all the same, and found a job in Petrograd, however strange it is. It was very difficult to find a job in Petrograd then. She had the right of residence, because she was the daughter of a Nikolai's soldier [Yankel]. In Petrograd she worked in the house of rich people by the name of Shuster, in the position of a nurse. The family was so rich that they could afford to hire their own nurse. Her duties included providing massages and injections, as they weren't very healthy people, all of them. And there in Petrograd in 1917 she met Iosif Lazarevich and married him. They got married in Petrograd, and then went to Baku. Sara Shamesh died in 1964 in Leningrad, and was buried at the Jewish cemetery.

Sara's sister, Rosalia Yankelevna Furmanova, nee Reizl Shamesh, was born in Kharkov, too. She didn't receive any education. She got married very early, at the age of 18 or 19. Her husband Furmanov was the son of a lishenets [lishenets – a man deprived of civil rights in the Soviet period before Stalin], a manufacturer in the past. His factory used to produce beds. He was arrested in 1936 after a denunciation, subjected to repressions and died in prison. And she became a widow, left alone with her daughter, but relatives supported her, and her daughter was able to receive some education. During the war she was in Perm together with our family, where the Kirovsky Theater was evacuated. She managed to flee from Kharkov literally with the last train, and they lived with our family in Perm throughout the war. By the way, she was a very beautiful woman.

My paternal grandmother, Dinora Gdaliyevna Dombrovskaya, was born in Tomsk in Siberia in 1885, and died around 1960. She kept her maiden name after marriage. She came from a large family, she had many brothers. I don't remember their names. After finishing grammar school at the age of 18, she entered the St. Petersburg Medical Institute and became a dentist. She had dentist's equipment installed in her apartment, and she received patients there. Dinora was a girl of strict rules: a student, who wanted to find her own path. In 1917, when the revolution broke out, she got married and lived with her husband, my grandfather Leib Borisovich Zilber, in Tavricheskaya Street in Leningrad.

Leib Borisovich Zilber was an engineer. He left with his family to work in the city of Mariupol in Ukraine, where they stayed for a rather long period, and then returned to Petrograd. He died in Leningrad in 1941, at the beginning of blockade, at the age of 61.

My father, Boris Leibovich Zilber, was born in 1912 in Petrograd. His mother was a dentist, his father an engineer. He had problems with acquiring an education afterwards, because he was the son of intellectuals. [Editor's note: In the times when Boris was trying to enter an institute, there existed an official quota for applicants: mainly they admitted the children of workers and peasants. Each applicant from the intellectuals' family encountered obstacles if he wanted to enter a college. It was not about your nationality, it had to do with your social status.]

Because of his origin he could enter only three institutes in Leningrad: the Institute of Physical Culture, the Agricultural Institute and the Textiles Institute. He chose the Textiles Institute, when he was about 18. Kosygin was a student of the same institute in the same period. [A.N. Kosygin (1904-1980): a prominent Soviet public figure, from 1964 to 1997 – the Chairman of the Council of

Ministers of the USSR] Grandfather was his classmate, they were in the same year and even had very close relations. Boris graduated from the Textiles Institute and worked at the 'Red Thread' factory. Boris was a dispatcher of the quality control department, though he wanted to do something different, but it was impossible.

Then the war began in 1941, he went to the front as a volunteer and died in 1942. I never saw him. I don't know very much of his love affair with Mom. I know that Daddy was a very sociable man: he had a lot of friends and acquaintances. Probably, one of Mother's friends introduced them. They were young, they were both on vacation in Sudak, and might have met each other there.

My mother was born in the city of Baku in 1918. Mom was brought up by a nanny in Baku. When she was a small girl, she went to the synagogue with her grandfather Lazar Grigorievich, and her schoolmates used to make fun of her, and she was even criticized somewhere in a newspaper: they wrote that 'Rita wears a pioneer tie [8](#), but visits a synagogue with her grandfather.'

The Raitsykh family lived in a good apartment in Gimnazicheskaya Street in Baku. That was a very decent house. There were seven or eight rooms in their apartment. There was an ice-box, a special room for storing food products, because it was very hot in Baku. They had ice brought especially for that purpose. The big family of Raitsykh in Baku consisted of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother Lazar Grigorievich and Hanna Iosifovna Raitsykh, my grandfather Iosif Lazarevich Raitsykh, his wife Sara Yankelevna and their daughter Genrietta Iosifovna.

By 1932, Mom had moved with her family to Leningrad, and began to study ballet dancing. I don't remember the surname of her teacher in Baku, but I know that there was a school there that provided choreographic training. However, the Baku level of preparation was absolutely insufficient to enter a ballet school in Leningrad. Mom entered a choreographic school, but received a bad mark for technical merit, and a good mark for artistic abilities. My mother always worshipped Ulanova, she was the only standard for her in arts, because Ulanova was more than simply a ballet dancer. She was an artistic phenomenon that had an international significance, and that phenomenon had its roots here in Leningrad. [Ulanova, Galina (1910-1998): Soviet dancer, considered to be one of the greatest ballerinas of the 20th century.]

While working in Kirovsky Theater [1939-1959], my mom found herself in a specific environment, with its own rules and traditions. That was a special theater, the Imperial Mariinsky Theater, where Jews had never been admitted! A tradition remains a tradition. But that tradition was broken in the Soviet times. Before the revolution there were no Jews in ballet, even musicians of the orchestra all got christened. For example, a well-known musician, Volf Israel, was baptized. And Mravinsky's aunt, the famous singer Mravina, she, too, was christened! There was a singer called Tartakov, a famous bass, he was a baptized Jew. So in general it was impossible for a Jew to cross the threshold of Kirovsky Theater.

The famous Russian ballerina Anna Pavlovna Pavlova was an illegitimate daughter of a laundry owner and an attorney. The attorney was Jewish. He didn't marry Pavlova's mother, but recognized the child. He bought a laundry for Pavlova's mother and made her the owner. Before that, she was a simple laundress. Pavlova writes in her memoirs that as a girl she had often been to the theater with her mom. What laundress is this that could go to a theater?! Certainly, having such support, decently dressed, she could afford to take her child to a theater. You should understand that it was before the revolution. Then she officially married a retired soldier, Pavlov, who gave her daughter

his surname. When for the first time her mother brought small Anechka to the choreographic school, there was a class lady who said: 'But we don't take Yids!' She brought her the following year, and then somebody had probably asked someone, or something else happened, and she was admitted.

The first manager of the museum of the Kirovsky Theater was the famous photographer Shishkanov, he knew the biographies of Shalyapin, Pavlova and other leading figures of ballet and opera very well. He was an excellent photographer, a very erudite man and it was him who told us the whole story. The theater photographers were very highly qualified, and one of them was Mr. Bakman. Another expert photographer was Efraim Zalmanovich Lesin, a disciple of Petrov-Vodkin. He was a very good photographer too, and worked in the Kirovsky Theater for many years. When he retired he left for Israel.

When the war began in 1941, the Kirovsky Theater was evacuated to Molotov in an organized manner. Artists were permitted to take no more than 20-30 kilograms with them on the train. It was a train especially provided for the employees of the Kirovsky Theater. Families of artists and employees were allowed to go by the same train. By miracle that train wasn't bombed on the way. Many trains were heading East then - to Perm, to the Urals. The trip in general was a hard and long one; some babies were born on the train. By the way, Grandfather attended to a delivery there, on the train.

### • **My childhood and youth**

I was born in October 1941 in Perm, in evacuation, it was the city of Molotov then. The war was going on by then. A few more children were born there, to actors' families, so here I am, one of them. In Molotov my mom received the bad news about the death of her husband in 1942. In Perm the Kirovsky Theater conducted ballet and opera performances. They lived very poorly, there wasn't enough to eat, not enough clothes to put on, but they proceeded to perform.

In three years the war was over. I remember very well our departure from Perm with my grandmother. I mean the departure itself, because I was very much affected by that extremely loud hooter of the steam locomotive, now nobody knows how it sounds any more. It was an absolutely wild siren. I don't know how my ear-drums didn't explode. That hooter of the steam locomotive, the blackness of that railway terminal, if it could be called a terminal at all. And that waiting for the train, that roar, staying at the station, I remember very well.

And the return to our destroyed two-room apartment in Rubinshtein Street, that is among the brightest of my memories, too. We found out that someone had put some hot objects, like hot kettles or pans - there were characteristic spots - on pieces of furniture, and that more than half of our things had been simply burned. We were left with nothing after the war. Complete strangers from the street lived in our apartment in our absence. Here and there, Mom saw some of our belongings in other people's hands, but it was impossible to prove it.

When Grandmother and I came in, naturally, everything that was there was scattered all over the floor. A black round radio in the form of a plate was all dirty, but I had never seen a radio in my life. Everything was new for me. I seized it at once, and my whole face was immediately covered with dust and grease. And there was no water to wash me. The windows were sealed up. In general the



condition of the apartment was awful, as far as a child can understand, at least it seemed strange and awful to me.

Shortly after the war was over, Mom married Mikhail Lvovich Dolkart, but they got divorced soon. Dolkart was Jewish, but my mother somehow couldn't live in harmony with him for long. Jewish traditions in our family were kept only by Grandfather. Then Mom finished a correspondence course at the Conservatory and taught in the famous Leningrad Ballet on Ice. After a serious operation she left the stage. By then she had another husband, who was very devoted to her and took care of her after the operation. He saved my Mom, but died himself, and Mom's mother-in-law could not forgive her for that. Having left the theater, Mom hadn't lost her interest in ballet. She participated in the restoration of the city after the war. The Kirovsky Theater needed repairs, but there was a lack of manpower. Actors mended their costumes, washed the interiors of the theater after the war, participated in the restoration. It is all true, they really washed the boxes, dress circles and so on.

Strangely enough, our house in 23 Rubinshtein Street remained intact, and those two rooms that our family occupied on the fourth floor remained our property, because we were a family of a soldier lost in action. Stalin signed a decree then, granting the families of officers and soldiers, dead and alive, the right to use the apartments they occupied before the war, in spite of the fact that those apartments could be inhabited by others.

Our neighbors in the apartment [9](#) were the family of the commissary Yakimov, a lieutenant colonel, who served in the Military Academy. He was quite a good man, a Russian, Konstantin Ilyich Yakimov, a kind-hearted person. But he was a man of his time. His wife's name was Alexandra Samoilovna Shapiro. In the beginning, our two families were on very good terms with each other, and we were friends, but then unfortunately we fell out, simply got tired of each other in the kitchen.

In post-war times, a strictly regulated quantity of food products was distributed on cards [10](#), all the rest was on sale for free market prices, and hardly anybody could afford it. People had to plan their family budgets based on these cards. But is it possible to feed a family of four or even five with ten or fifteen eggs? On Sundays we had potatoes and herring for breakfast. Yes, such was our breakfast. And a very good breakfast, if you asked us. We had vegetable medley frequently. But it was a bit later. And then, when I went to school, by 1947, the situation became better.

Almost up to my school age Mom didn't take me to the kindergarten. There was a children's group, in which there were different children, also Jewish ones. However it wasn't a Jewish kindergarten. It was a paid private group, supervised by a woman of German origin. She took the kids for a walk, taught them the spoken German language and if she could – the German grammar. There were both Jewish and Russian children, whose parents were able and willing to pay. Our tutor's name was Elizaveta Konstantinovna, and we called her Tante Liza, because she tried to teach us some German. But what German could it be! She couldn't teach us to read Russian, if only a little bit. The thing is, though she was a very good woman, it all happened right after the war and everyday life was very hard.

I went to school in 1947. The school was in Proletarian Lane, nowadays Grafsky Lane. It is the city center, the corner of Rubinshtein Street and Proletarian Lane. The school exists until now, with a profound study of the Polish language. But it was an ordinary school back then, and we studied the

English language. My favorite subject in school was History. We had an absolutely charming teacher called Galina Markovna Rekhter, whom we all loved and respected. In the last years we studied serious things, when the program was aimed at the new and most contemporary history. She was Jewish, a very clever woman, behaved herself perfectly and knew how to conduct the class. When I met her later, she always remembered us all, and always asked me about everybody.

I can't say that anyone was treating me exceptionally badly at school. The school was good, the teachers were good. But everything could be expected from classmates. Especially by 1953 because the spirit of anti-Semitism was literally in the air [11](#). To say nothing of Mom, who was worrying that she would be dismissed from the theater, and on the whole, that they would take us all one day, put us in railway cars and exile us somewhere [12](#). Once my mother met a colleague on Nevsky Prospekt. Mom was holding me by the hand, and they were discussing the situation and whether they should prepare the valenki [Russian felt boots], and that it looked as though everyone would be put in 'teplushkas' quite soon [teplushka - a commodity car] and sent somewhere far to the North. That was their permanent subject for discussions. Everyone was in the state of fear.

I remember the celebration of the secular New Year of 1948, when I was seven years old. It was a usual secular celebration. There were many relatives and friends, and we have a photo from that event. The celebration took place in our home, because we had those two huge through-passage rooms, so we had to receive the guests anyway. Such were the dancing halls in the past. We had a good ceramic tile furnace – steam heating was not yet installed in 1948 – and we heated the rooms with fire wood, and it was a big problem to get that fire wood and heat these two large rooms. Grandfather Iosif Lazarevich stoked those furnaces himself; he was our chief 'stove-man.' We had exhaust ventilation. We lived on the fourth floor, we had such a steep staircase without a lift, and I feel terrified when I think of it. And it was a very hard climb for my grandfather, a sick man with short breath, it was really hard to ascend. But nevertheless, some patients came to see him on that fourth floor at his private practice.

I can remember quite well, that while my grandfather Iosif Lazarevich was alive, we couldn't even allow the possibility of skipping those two seders during Pesach. This was like a law! Grandfather read the prayer, and all of us sat and waited until he finished, and the prayer was rather long. Nobody touched any food. In general we always had matzah. Grandmother used to bake it herself. It was a whole procedure. We started to make matzah only after the war. I also took part, rolling out the dough, making small holes with a special rolling-pin. We were helped by a housemaid, everybody participated. I always liked Pesach, it was all very solemn.

We had a very kind housemaid, a Russian woman named Zhenya. The neighbors also had a housemaid. They shared a small room in the kitchen. They helped around the house and took care of the children. It was a difficult situation with children, since after the war there were no baths, and Zhenya would go to banya [13](#) with me. Later her boyfriend returned from the army, and they got married and left.

We celebrated, as everyone around, the New Year Day, 7th November [14](#) and 1st May. We sometimes went to see Grandmother's friend Raisa Abramovna Font on these holidays.

During my last years in school I also attended the children's art school in Tavricheskaya Street. I studied drawing. At school I had different friends, and Jews among them, too. There was one friend

called Rena Razhanskaya, who now lives in America, and another friend, Allochka, Alla Petrovna Shraer, also residing in the USA now.

I had neither brothers nor sisters, I grew up as an only child in the family. Sometimes in summer I was sent to a pioneer camp, because it was not always possible to rent a summer cottage [15](#). I had been to pioneer camps when I was a small girl. Certainly I was sent from VTO [the All-Russia Theatrical Society] to the camp for actors' children. One summer Mom taught me to swim.

I have absolutely unforgettable memories of March 1953. It was on 5th March when Stalin died. And this very day is my mom's birthday! Just imagine, what kind of atmosphere we had in our house: Grandfather was dead, Mom divorced my stepfather; Mom, Grandmother and I in those large rooms waiting, how things would turn out. Only women, the three of us, no support, no protection from anywhere. First of all, Mom was expecting that she would be dismissed from the theater, that she would lose her job, her piece of bread, as a Jew. Thank God, it didn't happen.

In my younger years I didn't go to the synagogue, because, first of all, it was not safe, and secondly, I had no time for that, I spent all my spare time in the Kirovsky Theater. All the Jewish influence on me was exerted not only by my grandfather Iosif, but also by the family of our relative, Yakov Abramovich Tverskoy, who was the son of a provincial rabbi from Tver region, and who suffered because of it, because his father, the rabbi, was put in jail in 1922 or 1924, and when he wanted to protect his father and restore justice, they sent him to jail. That's why Yakov Abramovich didn't receive an education, but he strictly kept to Jewish traditions. He had some rare Jewish books, which I looked through at his home. He emigrated to Israel at the beginning of the 1960s, as soon as an opportunity presented itself. He died long ago.

He was not alien to arts, he showed me a very good edition, in French, I think, of Marc Chagall [16](#). Later, when we were on an excursion to the Russian Museum with our art school, I saw the originals by Chagall in store-rooms, the pictures that were not exposed to the general public. We, the students of the art school, were lucky to see the works of Chagall, Serebryakova and other tremendous masterpieces. [Galina Serebryakova: a relative of Lancere and Benoit, emigrated from Russia, lived in Paris, the author of numerous brilliant works of art, a pearl of the Russian fine arts.]

After leaving school I entered Mukhina Art School. First, the preparatory courses. Now this school is the Artistic and Industrial Academy named after Vera Ignatievna Mukhina. Before the revolution, it was Baron Stiglitz School. I was a student of the department 'Interior and Equipment' at the Textile Faculty there. I first entered the evening courses in 1962, and then switched over to the day-time studies. I graduated in 1968.

### • **Marriage and later life**

I married Arkadiy Mikhailovich Natarevich in 1967. His father, Mikhail Davidovich Natarevich, was born in Vitebsk, the city, where Chagall was born, and my husband asked his mother all his life: 'Mom, tell me, what is our relation to Chagall? And his mother would take a long time telling him what kind of kinship they were to Chagall. It's not a fairy tale, it's such a 'distant' Jewish kinship. His mother, Olga Alekseevna Natarevich, knew what an extremely distant and complicated relationship they had with the famous Chagall.

My husband is an artist, a member of the Union of Artists, and he is dealing with stained-glass windows. In March/April 2001, there was an exhibition of four generations, in which artists starting from Mikhail Davidovich Natarevich and up to his grandsons took part. Arkadiy, certainly, took part, as did his two sisters, one of them an architect, the other – a graphic artist. Also there was a large exhibition in the Manezh.

My husband's father Mikhail Davidovich Natarevich, an artist, was a Jew with religious feelings deep in his soul. But his inner religiosity was hard to be seen in the years when he had to join the Communist Party in order to pursue his career and feed his family. Mikhail Davidovich moved from Vitebsk to Moscow in the 1920s, entered the Arts College and worked in a theater as a props manager. In 1930 he moved to Leningrad and met his Russian wife Olga Alekseevna. She failed to graduate from the Academy of Arts and later worked as an architect. They got married shortly after.

They lived very poorly in Leningrad, starved during the war, even when Mikhail Davidovich lectured at the Academy of Arts. The son of Olga Alekseevna and Mikhail Davidovich, my husband Arkadiy, was brought up in an artistic atmosphere. I heard about Arkadiy Natarevich, when I was still a student of the evening courses in the institute. And he was a day-course student. At first I asked my friend, Nina Solovei, 'What kind of a person is he?' She answered, 'This Natarevich, he is very talented and paints very well already.' And indeed, he graduated from that Higher Arts School at the Academy.

Once we were walking along Liteiny Avenue, heading to my house, and she pushed me suddenly with her elbow and said, 'Here is Natarevich!' And there he was, walking with his friend. And that's where I saw him for the first time, and then we got acquainted at a party in the Academy of Applied Arts and even danced a little. He went to see us off. We noticed each other at once. He was ten months older than me, and as a student two years ahead of me, and studied in another department. Accordingly, he graduated before me. We got acquainted in 1962, and married in 1967.

Our son Iliya was born in 1971. But my child is ill; he's got cerebral palsy. We now live together: I, my mom, my husband, my son, and our dog Chan.

Unfortunately, very many of our friends are now dispersed all over the world: in Israel, the USA, Germany and other countries. We have been abroad with my husband. For the first time we went abroad in 1986: we were in Hungary. We had a friend there and we visited Budapest, and we liked it a lot. It was not so easy for us to leave the country. My husband was let out as a member of the Union of Artists very easily. But as for me, enormous obstacles were put in my way by the OVIR [the Department of Visas and Registration], I get scared now when I recollect the procedure.

I haven't managed to do interesting creative work in my life, my artistic interests failed to find expression. Unfortunately I live a very restricted life because of my family situation. Although my son is a grown-up man by now, my mom alone would have hardly managed to take care of him and basically it is I who keeps the house.

Despite my son's condition, I was able to give him a high school education, he actually studied by himself, I just saw him off to school and back. It was a school in Zvenigorodskaya Street, a school for deaf persons, but with a normal program. That is, the program was a little bit stretched out in

time, but otherwise it was a usual high-school program. So I went to school with him for about four years. I would take him by the hand, and as he was no longer a small boy, but a grown-up lad, it was rather hard for me physically. It was impossible to take him there in a wheelchair. It is generally difficult to roll a wheelchair in Leningrad. It is easy to roll a wheelchair in your courtyard, but otherwise... We usually took a trolley-bus near the Kazan Cathedral and reached the school somehow. Unfortunately he was not able to graduate from the Library College, because it appeared even more difficult, for me anyway.

- **Glossary:**

## **1 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.

## **2 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.

## **3 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **4 Nikolai's army**

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

## **5 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)**

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness

and so forth.

## **7 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.

## **8 All-Union pioneer organization**

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

## **9 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.

## **10 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **11 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.'

## **12 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

## **13 Banya**

A banya is a specifically Russian feature, a kind of big sauna for public use where people not only wash themselves, but also bring their bodies in healthier state by way of exposing them to the impact of very hot steam and massage with brooms of birch branches. Before the war and for a long time after the war, the majority of Soviet people did not have a bath tub at their homes, to say nothing of shower and hot water. You could only get cold water from taps. But still, the most important and traditional function of banya, taking its roots deep into the history of Russia, was to sweat in the sweating room. The rich clients could afford paying to special attendants who would beat them hard with the birch brooms on their naked bodies, thus increasing blood circulation and improving the overall condition of their health. Banyas are still very popular in Russia. They have similar things in Finland, not for public use, but private ones, for one family each, and they use dry heat there, rather than wet steam. They don't use birch brooms, either.

## **14 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

## **15 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.

## **16 Chagall, Marc (1889-1985)**

Russian-born French painter. Since Marc Chagall survived two world wars and the Revolution of

1917 he increasingly introduced social and religious elements into his art.