Galina Barskaya

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My family background

My name is Galina Veniaminovna Barskaya. My Jewish name was Hannah. My aunt, who raised me, said that my real name was Hannah-Reizele. The problem is that my mother had left no documents, and I know these things only from the words of my aunt. My real age is also a mystery, and the date of my birth was established by the Jewish rabbinical court.

The court has established the date of my birth: 24th December 1914. Court proceedings took place in Kremenchug in around 1918 when we moved there. My mother died very early, when I was still a baby, and my father was at the front at the time, so nobody knew my real date of birth.

My father’s name was Demyan Barsky, but for some reason I was registered as ‘Veniaminovna’ by patronymic. My father was certainly Jewish. My sister, who was born from a different mother, had the patronymic ‘Demyanovna.’

I was born in the town of Mozyr, Belarus. I never knew my grandparents – by the time of my birth they had already died, and there was nobody who could tell me about them.

My mother's first name was Malya, last name – Barskaya, and I don't know her maiden name.

When World War I broke out, my father was called up to serve, and he left her pregnant, alone, with three children. She had a very difficult pregnancy and died in labor because of heavy bleeding. Mozyr was a very small town and nobody could provide first aid to her, so she died in labor. That's what I learned from my elder sister, Yekaterina, who was born in 1904. I also had an elder brother, Grigory, who was born in 1910.

We were left orphans for our father was at the front. Our elder sister, Yekaterina, substituted Mother for us, because she was very practical. She took care of us, and this was our only hope. We had a lot of problems, even lice, because nobody took real care of us. My poor sister had some problem with her hair – she lost all her hair for some reason.

When our father learned that our mother had died and we three were left as orphans, he, being in the front-line forces, cut off his finger in order to be sent home. He did it on purpose. I don't know whether anyone understood why he did it, but he was transferred to the reserve and came home to us.

I don't remember how Father came to Mozyr because I was very young. In general, I remember nothing of our life in Mozyr, not even our house. My sister said that my father got married again then and brought a beautiful woman to our house. But she was not nice to us, so he divorced her.

After that, Father took us all to Kremenchug, Ukraine, where he found a job as a butcher. He was a specialist in preparing meat for making sausages. I am not sure, but I think he worked as a butcher before the war as well.

There, in Kremenchug, lived the family of my father's brother, Grigory. It was them who persuaded my father to leave Mozyr because of unemployment there, due to which we were often starving. In Kremenchug my father had a job and we did not starve any more. He would bring meat from the butchery and our life became better.

I don't really remember our apartment. I remember that we lived behind the railway embankment. We rented a room in the basement. The room was large, or maybe it looked large to me because I was small. For some time we all slept on the plank bed made by my father. The floor was the earth, and it was very cold in winter. There also was a furnace that my sister Katya [short for Yekaterina] stoked, but we did not always have wood, so my memories of that room are only linked with cold.

I also remember a Jewish pogrom 1 in Kremenchug. There were many different gangs out there, and there was more than one pogrom in that city. Our family was lucky – we were not attacked, but I remember feathers flying in the street from the pillows that gangsters tore apart. For some reason it made a big impression on me. I remember looking with fear outside from the window of our deep basement. I remember how our old Jewish neighbor was beaten in the street. But I don't know what happened to him then, whether he was killed or not. I remember that my sister, brother and I hid every day because gangsters would attack the town every day. Fortunately, they never burst into our house, probably, because there was nothing to take from us.

Growing up in my uncle and aunt's family

Later, in 1918, father gave me to the family of his brother Grigory, because he could not raise all of us. I also think he began dating another woman. That's what my sister told me. My brother and sister stayed with our father.

The name of my father's brother, into whose family I was sent, was Grigory Barsky. He was very handsome – I wish I had a photo of him. During World War I he fought at the front, and then he joined the party of Bolsheviks 2. He fought for the Red Army in the Civil War 3, lost an arm there. He was very joyful and optimistic. I remember he brought me a lot of presents – fabric for dresses, toys and sweets. He loved me very much because he had no children of his own.

He also worked in the special Extraordinary Commission for fight against counter-revolution. I don't know what happened then – there was some case concerning Orthodox priests who were to be shot but Uncle Grigory had pity on them and let them go… So, Uncle Grigory and a big group of his colleagues were shot instead. Only later a special message came from the capital of the Ukrainian Republic, which was Kharkov then, that they were innocent and should be released. But it was too late. Among those who were shot there were several Jewish communists, including my uncle.

He left a note and somehow managed to pass it to my aunt. In the note he wrote that they were innocent, that they were always fighting for the right cause and that they were condemned unjustly. I know that my aunt kept this note but it was too late. She tried not to talk about it, but I still don't remember that anyone was punished for their shooting.

My aunt was Olga Samoilovna Barskaya; I don't know her maiden name. After her husband died, my aunt found a job at the same butchery where my father was working. She also was working with preparing meat for sausages. For her, delicate and tiny, it was very hard. The workers stood on a cement floor in heavy boots because the floor was full of water for washing meat. To get to work she had to walk across the whole town because there was no transportation. She left early in the morning and came home when it was dark – almost night. I remember when she took off her boots after work she would always pour out water from them. Her life was very hard. But there was no way out – she had to provide for her family.

My aunt owned a small house on Pushkinskaya Street, in the yard. The house was tiny – two small rooms. The smaller room served as a kitchen. The toilet was outside and was shared by several neighbors. Water was to be carried from a well two blocks away. I was seven or eight years old and I had to drag buckets of water home because my aunt would come home frozen, with wet feet, so she needed water to wash and to cook.

There was a house facing the street, where another Jewish family lived – a shoemaker and his numerous kids. I remember it was always dirty in his house. But in our home it was always clean. My aunt's mother lived with us and she always cleaned the house and kept everything in order. Aunt's mother – I called her grandmother – lived in the room that was combined with the kitchen. I don't remember what her name was – I always called her grandmother.

In the same room two brothers of Aunt Olya lived as well. Her elder brother's name was Nachman; her younger brother's name was Avrum. They were adults. In the second room my aunt's sister Leah, whom we called Leika, and I lived – sleeping on a bed made of wooden boards. Nacham also had an elder sister, but she got married and lived separately.

The family was very poor. We all lived at the expense of Aunt Olya's salary. Her younger brother Avrum was handicapped – his one arm was paralyzed and hung in a black sling. I don't know whether he received any pension. But since early childhood he got used to go to the market, meet peasants who came to sell things and guard their goods when they had to go somewhere. Avrum was a very honest person, and peasants highly respected him and trusted him. For his guarding they gave him some of their goods – vegetables, potatoes, sometimes even meat. That's what kept us living.

Her second brother, Nachman, had no permanent job. Sometimes he helped load goods at the market. Then he got married and moved to live with his wife.

Aunt's sister, Nechama, lived a little further on the same street. She had a tiny room and a very small kitchen, but her apartment was also very clean. Her sister Leah was single. She never worked outside the house – she helped Grandmother look after the house.

I don't remember my father keeping any Jewish holidays. He was not a religious man. But Grandmother, my aunt's mother, kept all Jewish holidays. She prayed every day. At home she had the Talmud and a Jewish prayer book. She always wore a dark dress and a headscarf. I don't remember her going to the synagogue, but she prayed at home. On Friday, before Sabbath, Grandmother lit candles every week. And every Sabbath she made a little celebration with the small portion of foodstuff we had at home – she was able to cook delicious dishes. I remember that on Purim she cooked Purim cakes – hamantashen – special cakes of triangle form that look like ears; they usually had poppy seeds and raisings and we liked to eat them very much.

We always celebrated Passover. On its eve we had a major cleaning of our house, taking all garbage away. We took kosher crockery from a box and celebrated the holiday. We always had matzah on Passover. Grandmother cooked Jewish dishes that we had to eat on Passover. She also made tasty and beautiful matzah balls for chicken soup. I still remember this chicken soup with matzah balls. She was a true Jew, who kept all traditions. That's how she was raised.

At home, my grandmother and aunt spoke in Yiddish to each other and in Russian to me. But I understood some words from their conversations and I still remember some Yiddish words.

I liked living with my aunt. I remember my father once decided to take me home. I don't know why he decided so. But suddenly my aunt told me, 'You father is coming.' I got so scared because I got used to living with her and did not want to leave. On that day I was coughing hard. So, when I heard that my father was coming, I climbed under the bed on the floor. Our floor was very old, cold and dusty. I felt that I was about to start coughing again, but I restrained myself. My father talked to my aunt for a short time and then left again. I climbed out from under the bed. And you know, I stopped coughing on that day.

In general, there were a lot of Jews in Kremenchug. Almost all of them worked in various trades – they were shoemakers, tailors and merchants. There was a synagogue in the town, but my aunt never went there, while my grandmother was too old to leave the house.

Relationships between people of different nationalities were good. We never thought about who was who in nationality.

My school days

Not far from our house there was a Jewish school, and I was sent there. But I did not like it there because I could hardly understand Yiddish. So I said I was not going there again. I don't remember exactly what I did not like there, but I was stubborn. Instead of going to school I went to a club that was not far from us and played rocks with other children there. We made our 'rocks' from the dry bones that my aunt brought from her work. Finally, my aunt understood that I would not study at the Jewish school, and sent me to a Ukrainian school. The Ukrainian school was far away from us, I had to cross the whole town, but I liked going there.

Later, when I was studying at school, Aunt Olya got married. Her husband was Russian – Nikolay Ivanovich Rukoyatkin. During the Civil War he fought and was awarded with medals. He was a member of the Communist Party and a very honored man. My aunt went to live with him in Novogeorgiyevsk. Her husband was working there as chairman of a furniture artel, and their life was good. I was left in Kremenchug; they did not take me with them. My father also lost any interest in me – he married another woman and left Kremenchug. My sister Yekaterina moved to Lugansk, while my brother entered the naval college. So, I was left alone, with no rights.

At school I had a friend, Dora Marakon. I began to live with them. They had two rooms – a smaller and a bigger one. They heated the smaller one, but I slept in the bigger room, which was not heated. My bed was standing by the window. I got sick there and had very high fever. After that I lost my voice. I don't even know whether Dora's family was paid for taking me, but I assume that they simply had pity on me. It was a Jewish family of very kind people. They were poor, but they had pity on me, and I stayed with them for several years.

As I already mentioned, people of many nationalities lived in our town. There was a Catholic Church not far from our house, and when I was young, I played with the Catholic priest's daughters. The priest was a very gloomy and strict man. We were scared of him. But his wife and daughters treated me very well. I never had dolls to play with, so these girls and I sewed dolls from the leftovers of some clothes and played with them. Their mother always fed me.

I liked studying at school. We had Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish students, and everyone treated each other well. Our teachers also made no difference between children of different nationalities. I was an excellent student and was about to enter the eighth grade. At that time, only good students could study at the eighth grade. So, after the seventh grade, a group of us, good students, was transferred to another school, which was located even further. I went there several times and realized that I could not study there. So, I quit school and entered a technical college. I liked technical education classes even at our secondary school. I was always good at them. So, in the college I learned to work at a lathe and I enjoyed working at it.

At school I joined the ranks of young pioneers 4. I liked all gatherings of pioneers, but I was never sent to a pioneer summer camp. At the college I became an active Komsomol 5 member and I also worked as a pioneer leader at our school.

We liked to go to our club. At the club our youth sang songs about themselves and the problems of our time. When I was still a schoolgirl my friends and I found all kinds of ways to get to the club without tickets. But now, after I had entered college and joined the Komsomol, I had a chance to perform in the club too.

We were fed in the college. In those years there was famine in Ukraine 6, and life was hard. I remember we were given a few small lollipops each, and we had a competition – who could drink more cups of tea with only one lollipop.

I lived in a dormitory and I had my own 'corner' there. Aunt Olya and her husband Nikolay came to visit me, and I visited them in Novogeorgiyevsk.

By that time my sister had got married and moved to Lugansk region to live with her husband in the small town of Gadyach. My sister never had a chance to get education. Prior to getting married she was a common worker at a plant. She learned to read and write only during evacuation, and she never learned any spelling rules.

My brother, Grigory, studied at the Sevastopol Naval College. Let me tell you a little more about my brother. He was very handsome and very talented. In Sevastopol he was one of the few who were sent to the naval college of Leningrad. In Leningrad a daughter of the chief of the college fell in love with him. The chief had no desire to see them together because my brother was a junior officer and a Jew. So, when he finished the college, he was sent to serve in Vladivostok – as far from the chief's daughter as possible.

There he was growing as a specialist and later became commander of the submarine base. Back in the college my brother somehow managed to change his nationality and got registered as a Russian with the last name of Boyarsky. He knew that no Jews were allowed to get high-ranking positions in the army and in the Navy. I learned about all of this only after the war, when he came to visit me.

My work experience in Batumi, Georgia

After completion of the technical college, two boys, one girl and I were sent to work in Batumi, Georgia. Batumi is a wonderful city, but there are frequent rains there. Because of the rains my only pair of shoes got spoiled very quickly. It was the only time when I turned to my father with the request to help me buy a pair of shoes because I had nothing to wear at all. My father did not even answer me; he sent my letter to my brother, who bought me shoes and sent them to me.

In Batumi I lived in a dormitory with the girl from Kremenchug, and our boys lived in another room.

I was appointed forewoman of the packing workshop, where cigarettes were packed. I remember very well that the packing machines were created by a Jew – Feldman – and were called Feldman machines. I learned how to operate those machines very quickly. But I had a trouble there – my finger got between two gears of the machine and I remained handicapped for the rest of my life.

I had a lot of friends. All of my friends treated me very well – local Georgians and Russians – even though they knew I was Jewish. But nobody paid any attention to such things at the time. I was an active Komsomol member, performed in the club and conducted classes of political information in our workshop.

I was noticed. I was summoned to the KGB 7, but I was not afraid to go there because I was absolutely honest and feared nothing. So, a KGB officer began to recruit me to bring information to him. He told me that I was working at a tobacco factory where the best tobacco was made and sent

to Stalin. But a lot of tobacco was stolen from our factory, so I had to watch people closely and find out who was stealing and then let him know. I was also to listen to what people said against Stalin and the Party. He told me that if I heard anything bad I had to write about it to him and sign with the nickname ‘Match.’

So, I listened to him, said goodbye, and left. I was walking and thinking, ‘Oh my God, what should I do? How can I watch and provide information against good people?’ So, my friends from Kremenchug and I decided to flee from Batumi. But we could not just get up and leave, because we were obliged to work there for three years after our college. So, one day we received our salaries, bought steamship tickets and left. We did not tell anyone anything. We did not take our documents. We came to Kremenchug and then my photos and documents were sent to me by mail. But I was never again summoned to the KGB and had no further trouble from them. I think I was just lucky.

Moving to Kiev

I went to Aunt Olya to Novogeorgiyevsk, from where she, Uncle Nikolay and I went to see Kiev, which was the new capital. It was in 1934. I saw Kiev and did not want to leave it; I liked it very much. Most of all I remember the Opera House and flowerbeds with flowers in the form of pictures. I did not want to return to Novogeorgiyevsk. So, Uncle Nikolay, who was highly respected everywhere, asked some friends and they allowed me to stay in a dormitory.

Then I began to work at a car-repair plant where I met my future husband, who was chief of a workshop. My husband, Semen Yakovlevich Natov, was Jewish. His true last name was Radulsky. His real first name was Natan. For some reason, even before I met him, he changed his first and last names and became Semen Natov. My husband was a good draughts-player. He organized draughts games in the Soviet Union, selected gifted children, and taught them. He also organized the first children’s chess and draughts club under the Pioneer House.

I was a very good worker. The chief of the police, who liked me, helped me get registered in the dormitory of another plant. And everything was fine until the dormitory chief learned that I was working at a different plant. So, they threw me out of the dormitory. But I was already known as a good Komsomol member. At that time the Communist Party sent active Komsomol members to work with children. So, I was sent to work as a pioneer leader at school. I was lucky – I got to work at a school downtown, in Vladimirskaya Street. I lived in the apartment of my aunt’s friend, a Jew. I lived in the district of Podol [8] and every day I went a very steep street up to work because I wanted to save money on transportation.

I never told anyone that I was Jewish, because I looked very Russian, but I certainly always remembered that I was Jewish. I never concealed this information, but neither did I make it public – it was easier to live this way. So, I had no problems with my nationality. I never thought about my Jewish identity. I did not even know whether there was a synagogue in Kiev.

Children who were in my charge loved me. I organized such events and performances of pioneers that people from other schools came to watch them. The themes of these events were different – Lenin’s birthday, October Revolution Day [9], Parisian Commune Day, etc.

At school I worked until 1937. Then, when the war in Spain broke out 10, Spanish children were brought to Kiev. In one of Kiev's health centers a special house for the Spanish children was organized. Out of all the pioneer leaders of Kiev, I was selected to work in this house, even though I was Jewish.

By that time I was already married. We did not get married at once because we had nowhere to live. Prior to that, Semen lived with his mother in a small room. His mother dyed clothes and fabric. Her business was illegal at the time and she did it at home. Throughout their small room there were all kinds of things hanging; their room smelled strongly of paint. So, we could not live there. I never knew his father, because his mother divorced him long before I met her.

Then, his mother bought us a room in the apartment of Professor Bykhovsky. He was a famous oncologist in Kiev. He had a huge apartment downtown. He had a young wife, and when the professor died, she began to sell this apartment room-by-room. My mother-in-law bought us a small room and that's when Semen and I registered our marriage and began to live together.

We got married in 1937. In 1938 I gave birth to our son. When I began to work at the Spanish orphanage I was not yet pregnant. When my son was born, children from this orphanage came to the hospital to visit me, brought me flowers and a huge cake, on which they wrote 'Ramon.' That was the name they decided to give to my son. So, I called him Ramon, and he later changed his name to Roman, which was more common here.

The times of Great Terror

At that time political repressions and arrests started 11, but we did not know why.

I remember we went to see people's commissioner Postyshev and asked him to help us organize a celebration for children. [Postyshev, Pavel (1887-1939) – a Soviet Communist Party activist.] While talking to him I noticed that he was very nervously counting the beads and hardly heard what we asked him for. By the way, it was Postyshev who allowed people to put up New Year trees [a Soviet version of the Christmas tree]; before him it was forbidden. Soon after that Postyshev was arrested.

My sister's husband, Zinoviy – I forgot his last name – also suffered at that time. He was always telling jokes and anecdotes, and because of those anecdotes he was arrested on the eve of World War II and sentenced to ten years in camps in Siberia. He came home only in the 1950s.

We certainly had no idea then that innocent people were arrested. I remember addressing meetings of people where I put to shame Postyshev and other people who were repressed or shot. We believed Stalin without reserve, unconditionally.

In 1939, when our troops entered the territory of Western Ukraine, my husband was called up to the army. But that campaign did not last long and he soon returned home.

From the Spanish children and adults who came with them we certainly knew some things about the fascists, but we never imagined that it could touch us. After the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 12 we were sure there was no danger of a war. Even though my husband told me often that he could 'smell' war in the air.

The beginning of the Great Patriotic War

I remember my husband was in Rostov with his students from the Pioneer House; there was a draughts and chess tournament. Suddenly, early in the morning, we heard explosions. The sound was as if ice was blown up, but it was 22nd June 1941. We did not know then that it was the beginning of the war. Then we heard Molotov's 13 address on the radio and learned that the fascists had traitorously attacked our Motherland and the war broke out. My husband returned to Kiev with his students even though it was very hard because of panic with buying railway tickets. It seemed that everyone was going somewhere.

My husband was not called up at once. He had once, in his youth, worked in the North with rafting woods and he had experience in managing barges. So, he went to the district party committee and volunteered to raft women and children to evacuation on the river. There was a pioneer camp near the Dneper. All women who worked or were wives of workers of the Pioneer House came together there with their children and belongings. They were not allowed to take a lot of things with them so that they would not overload the barge. Nobody thought evacuation would be long. My husband decided to take us to Kremenchug, where my relatives lived. Aunt Olya was also there at the time. I thought I would stay there for two weeks and go home.

When we were getting on the barge, a bombing raid started. We had to lie on the ground and wait till it ended. It took us several days to reach our destination. We tried to move only at night in order to avoid bombing. But we were still bombed and several people were killed. In Kremenchug I stayed with Aunt Olya. We decided that if we had to go eastward, we would go to Lugansk, to my sister Yekaterina, who had moved there from Gadyach.

Long journey into evacuation

My husband returned to Kiev because he knew he had to be called up to the army. Near Kremenchug there was a big plant, and the Germans often bombed it. We decided that we had to go eastward. The military enlistment committee told us to get on a ship to Dnepropetrovsk. So, we went: Aunt Olya, my little son, and I. We also had Iosif, a son of aunt's sister Nechama, with us. She sent him into evacuation with us. He was 14-15 years old. All the rest of my relatives – Nechama, Leika, their mother, Avrum and Nachman with their spouses – all of them remained in Kremenchug. They believed nothing would happen to them because the Germans were 'good,' just like during World War I. They sent the boy with us only as a helping hand to us.

We could hardly find a seat on the ship to Dnepropetrovsk so crowded it was. We stayed on the deck. It was really cold to stay on the deck all the time, especially for a child. Thus we reached Dnepropetrovsk. There were got off the ship and got on open railway cars of some echelon. It was raining but there was no place to hide from the rain. A railway worker was passing by us and nailed a piece of plywood over our heads, so we hid under it.

Thus we reached Lugansk. We came to my sister and stayed with her. They lived in a semi-basement and had several rooms. My husband wrote to me there – somehow his telegram reached me – that the enemy was moving eastward and we should go to Pervouralsk. We also heard that Kiev had been captured and the Jews were killed. So, my husband insisted that we should move on. He had also been sent to Pervouralsk, probably because he was a draughts champion and the

authorities tried to save him.

Before our departure from Lugansk a terrible incident happened; it still leaves me sleepless. I entered a room and saw Iosif, Nechama's son, cutting the shoes of my sister. I told him, 'What are you doing? How will my sister walk without her shoes? Don't you know that it is wartime?' I tried to explain to him everything in simple, human words, but he got up and left. I sought for him for a long time but could not find him. So, we left without him. I still don't know what happened to him; probably he got killed with the rest of the Jews. Aunt Olya and I were very anxious about what we would say to his mother, Nechama. But we did not have to tell her anything, because Nechama, as well as Leika, Avrum, Nachman, and Grandmother, was killed in Kremenchug. The fascists shot them, just as they shot millions of other Jews. But we learned this news only after the war.

We went through Rostov. There we were received very well; we could wash and eat there. Then we went to Pervouralsk. A man joined us and told everyone that we were his family. I think he was a deserter from the army and it was easier for him to travel with a family. It was easier for us to travel with him because he could find bread and other food. Our traveling conditions were horrible. I remember entering the toilet once at a big railway station. There were a lot of women, who were raking off lice. All of them wore nice underwear because they tried to take it into evacuation with them, and from this underwear they raked off lice. My son and we also had lice.

I saw a whole echelon with Tatars who were taken out of the Crimea. They were starving because they were not allowed outside the train. So, they were reaching out their hands and begged for bread. They also sang sad and mournful songs.

Thus we, dirty and full of lice, reached Chelyabinsk, from where my husband took us to Pervouralsk in a wagon. There he rented two rooms from a landlady and we lived in comfort. First of all my husband took us to take a shower. He threw away many of our clothes that were full of lice. He also ordered a nice winter coat for me. I had a picture taken of my son and myself wearing this coat. I sent this picture to my husband to the front.

The thing is that as soon as we came to Pervouralsk, on 1st October 1941, my husband was called up to the army, and on 14th October he was sent to the front. I don't know why it happened, maybe somebody was envious about our happiness. Before his departure my sister threw a party, and for the first time in his life my husband got drunk. We did not even say a proper goodbye to each other.

We kept up a correspondence with him. I still have his pictures from the front. I also have his letters, where he wrote how much he loved my son and me, and what a wonderful life we would have after the war.

Well, there was no happy life after the war. In 1944, I was summoned to the military committee and given a death certificate for my husband. He was killed in fighting for the village of Babinovichi, Belarus.

When my husband was still in Pervouralsk, he found me a job at a pipe works. I was a good metalworker, and I was ordered to work with tools. I worked many hours, 10-12 hours a shift. Despite the fact that I had a small child, I still made time after work to take care of our tools, clean them, oil them and keep them in good working condition. I was an active Komsomol member and I

came up with the following task: I made huge maps of the fronts, hung them in the office of our plant and every day marked the movement of our troops with little red flags. I listened to everything the radio broadcast and copied information on these maps. By the way, I still have those maps.

One time the chief of my workshop called me and said, ‘Listen, you are causing every instrument in the plant to stop working.’ I was shocked when I heard that and scared. I was very young then. So I asked him, ‘How come?’ He said, ‘Every day when you show new information about our troops people stop working!’ I got very anxious and thought I was in trouble, but he patted me on the hand and said, ‘You are doing a great job! Afterwards they all work even better.’

In 1943, the government placed an important order with our plant – we made some pipes, as we learned later, for Katyusha guns. And the chief of our workshop, Altshuler, was awarded greatly after that. In general, there were a lot of Jews at our plant. The secretary of the Communist Party cell there was also Jewish.

I received 800 grams of bread a day on my bread card. So, our life was very hard. My son went to the kindergarten where children were fed. Aunt Olya and Uncle Nikolay came to see me and helped me a lot – they spent time with my son while I was working.

Returning to Kiev

When my husband was killed in 1944, Kiev had already been liberated. We decided to return to Ukraine. In order to leave we needed special permission. So, Nikolay, Olya’s husband, got me this permission. He was an old Bolshevik and nobody could refuse to do him a favor. First we went to Dnepropetrovsk to Nikolay’s relatives, and then my son and I went to Kiev.

My room, where I used to live with my husband, was occupied by a woman who had given birth to a child during occupation. For a long time I could not get into my own apartment. For some time I stayed with my mother-in-law, but I was not registered in Kiev. At that time the police did special raids to find illicit residents. I was caught in one of these raids and was taken to the police. There I explained everything, showed the documents that my husband had died, and with the police’s assistance we could move back to our room. The woman who had lived there sent her child to an orphanage and left. There was no furniture, because our neighbors took it during the occupation. I even saw a piece of my furniture in their room, but I could not tell them anything.

One more thing I’d like to add: before we left the Urals, the plant, the Jews who were working there warned me that terrible anti-Semitism had started in Ukraine. In order to find a job I went to see the second secretary of the city committee of the Communist Party in Kiev. He met me in Pervouralsk, where we worked together. When he saw me in Kiev, his first question was, ‘What is your nationality? I wanted to send you to do Komsomol work, but now I am not even sure of that…’ I don’t think he was an anti-Semite; he simply understood that he could not send me to a work place where Jews were not allowed any longer. Nevertheless, he helped me to find a job at the committee for industrial and polygraph industry, whose chief was also Jewish. I began to work as his secretary, then I was promoted to a personnel inspector, and then – to the office of the chief of the personnel department.

I forgot to mention that in evacuation I had joined the Communist Party, that is why I was entrusted with such a responsible position. But certainly, if my boss had not been Jewish, nobody would have ever appointed me to this office. In that position I worked for more than 26 years – for the rest of my life, till my retirement on pension. Our team was very friendly. We always celebrated all Soviet holidays together – 1st May, October Revolution Day, etc. Our whole organization would go to demonstrations and picnics together.

Manifestations of anti-Semitism

We had a lot of Jews at our work. Our chief hired them knowing that otherwise they would not find a decent job. Later, when inspectors from the district committee of the Communist Party or from higher organizations would come, they would put red marks against the names of the Jews on our list and show the list to me, saying that there were too many Jews in our organization. But our chief always stood up for us. The anti-Semitic campaign of the 1950s 14 did not touch us either. We certainly knew about it and were concerned, but it did not affect us.

In general, anti-Semitism was manifested in everything. For instance, Aunt Olya and Uncle Nikolay came to live with me. We all lived in one room, which was crowded, so Uncle Nikolay went to fight for a personal apartment. A representative of the Communist Party district committee came over to see how old party member Rukoyatkin was living. Suddenly he exclaimed with indignation, 'Couldn't you find a Russian or a Ukrainian woman for yourself! Why did you have to marry a Jew!' For a long time after that Nikolay could not get an apartment. Later he was given two small rooms in a communal apartment 15.

I was a propagandist; I graduated from the Marxism-Leninism University. I can tell you how I was present at a class of political courses where colonels and other officers studied; they were sitting and talking about the Jews. Then I was so indignant that I shouted, 'You are sitting here, in this course, studying Marxism-Leninism, while Marx was Jewish and Lenin's grandfather was Jewish!' They looked at me with great surprise that I would defend the Jews, but they decided I was Russian. Well, it's just a little detail about the atmosphere at that time.

My son's education and life

My son experienced full measure of anti-Semitism. He finished a regular Ukrainian secondary school with good marks. It was very hard to enter university right after school, so he went to college. But it was hard for him to even enter the college because he was Jewish, so Nikolay had to help him. Very often Nikolay had to put on all his medals that he was awarded during the Civil War and go and help us see justice.

After the college my son tried to enter the university for several years. He tried to enter the Polytechnic Institute two years in a row, then the Food Institute, then another institute. But the result was always the same – he got high marks on the profile subjects, like physics and mathematics, but for written exams he got poor marks, which the teachers gave him on purpose to prevent him from entering the university.

I went to see the education minister and showed him a pre-war book about Soviet draughts-players, where a whole chapter was devoted to my husband. I asked the minister to help my son to

get to university. It did not work. But the minister said that my son could enter the mechanic department – the most difficult one – of the Agricultural Academy to study by correspondence. Finally, my son entered it.

When he was defending his diploma project, he was singled out as one of the best students. So, he finally got a diploma – and hence started his problems with finding a job. The same situation repeated itself – going from enterprise to enterprise, from plant to plant; nobody wanted to give him a job. I went to the second secretary of the district Communist Party committee, who knew me for my propagandist work. Only due to his help my son was offered a job as a technologist at a plant.

My son's private life was unlucky. He was married but for a short time. Then he divorced his wife. Now he is working at a big plant, but he was never promoted because of his nationality. However, he does not demand much; he is easily content. Many of his friends have moved to Israel, America, or Germany, but my son does not even want to think about it. He loves Kiev and Ukraine very much; he cannot imagine his life outside this country.

My father died soon after the war in the town of Orsk where he was evacuated. It is located somewhere in Russia, in the Urals. Aunt Olya and Uncle Nikolay also passed away a long time ago: my aunt in 1962 and my uncle in 1964.

In the 1950s, my sister Yekaterina's husband returned from Siberia. His health was totally ruined. Soon after returning home he got ill with tuberculosis and died. My sister moved to live in Pervouralsk – it just so happened that her son lives there. My sister died in 1976.

My brother Grigory Barsky fought in the war and took part in the war against Japan 16. After the war he occupied high offices in the Navy. As I already mentioned, he had changed his nationality and was considered Russian, otherwise he would have never been promoted to any office. After demobilization he lived in Vladivostok. He died there in 1984.

I feel very sorry that I never went to Kremenchug, to the site of shooting of my relatives with whom I lived in my childhood. Now I realize that it is too late for me to look back to my sources, my Jewish roots. But I enjoy reading Jewish newspapers. I am also very concerned as I watch TV programs about Israel. I am worried about the developments in the Middle East. I hope people will have enough wit and patience to avoid a Third World War. This is all. Thank you.

Glossary

1 Pogroms in Ukraine
In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

2 Bolsheviks
Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the

minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionyery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

3 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

4 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.

5 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

6 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.

7 KGB

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

8 Podol

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

9 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.

10 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

11 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

12 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the

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

13 Molotov, V

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

14 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.'

15 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.

16 War with Japan

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.