Abram Bashmet

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Lvov
Ukraine
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Abram Bashmet is a young-looking man, a smart and pleasant conversationalist. He is a very busy man. He spends almost all of his time on the study and propaganda of creative activities of his son Yuri Bashmet 1, a genius musician, a great viola player of the present time. Abram Bashmet lives in the center of Lvov, in a quiet street, in a prewar house. These houses are called Polish in Lvov; before 1939 this part of Ukraine belonged to Poland 2, and the Poles constructed buildings here. His apartment is spacious and clean, there is nice modern furniture and house appliances – his son's presents. One can tell that there used to live a big and close family here. There are many photographs of his family, parents, children, grandchildren, posters, calendars and playbills with his son's pictures on the walls. The master of the house can talk about his son non-stop. He didn't quite like our request to talk about the past of his family at first, but later he warmed to this topic realizing the importance of the subject discussion.

My family

According to the legend that has passed from one generation to another in our family, at the very beginning of the 19th century – presumably in 1805 –our ancestor escaped from Odessa 3 to Istanbul, Turkey, to avoid service in the tsarist army. His name was lost, but his nickname of 'Valet' ['knave'] has been preserved in the memory of his successors speaking for his daring and reckless character. Sometime later he returned to Odessa bringing with him a young wife: either a Turkish girl, who adopted Judaism, or a Jewish girl from Istanbul. All Bashmet men have taken after this great-grandmother: they've been swarthy, with aquiline noses and dark eyes.

Valet also brought with him the new surname of Bashmet. 'Bash' – means 'head' in Turkish, and 'met' is a typical ending for Turkish surnames. He started the numerous Bashmet clan. It's a rare surname, and if we bumped into somebody with a similar surname this somebody happened to be

one of our relatives of some kind. He must have also founded the business that his successors continued: they kept the ‘Colonial Goods’ shop at the biggest market in Odessa selling goods supplied from Africa and Asia: tea, coffee, spices, etc.

Of all his children – and there were five brothers – we only know my great-grandfather Mordhe [Mordekhai] Bashmet [1835-1915]. He continued the trade business of his father. He was not a rich man and he was religious. He married a Jewish woman from Odessa: Malka-Perl [1837-1913], a daughter of the trader Aizik – I don’t remember his surname. They had two older sons, Yankel and Moisha, who moved to the USA at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century and were lost there. The daughters Surah and Tsyvie lived their life in Odessa; their husbands were vendors at the Privoz market, and they also dealt in trade. Odessa was a trading town – everybody dealt in trade and crafts.

Mordekhai’s younger son, my grandfather Avrum, was born in Odessa in 1872. He studied in cheder, like his brothers, and was helping his father in the shop. He kept the Jewish spirit in his house, the order that his ancestors had established, though one couldn’t call Jews in Odessa very religious. They went to the synagogue because this was a custom. On major Jewish holidays all neighbors, relatives and acquaintances dressed up, went to the synagogue and had traditional festive dinners at home: matzah dishes on Pesach, gefilte fish, chicken stew and broth. However, those meals did not have any special religious meaning: they were just paying tribute to their ancestors and general customs. On Saturday or Jewish holidays the Jewish stores were closed.

At 17 or 18 my grandfather was recruited to the army. He served as a private in an infantry regiment located in the vicinity of Grodno [today Belarus]. At that time soldiers who had Judaic faith were given leave on religious Jewish holidays. They joined Jewish families for celebrations. So one seder my grandfather came to the family of a wholesale fish trader named Michel Rohkes in the town of Indura [26 km south of Grodno, Belarus]. Everything was different for him on this day: the festive celebration according to all rules, the children posing four traditional questions, the family reclining on cushions, the thick red wine the remainder of which they poured into a big jug calling this the ‘Egyptian tortures.’ He was a soldier, and the food seemed extraordinarily delicious to him.

There were many people at the table, but Avrum laid his eye on the daughter of the master of the house, Feiga, born in 1876. I guess Avrum happened to visit the Rohkes house more often than holidays occurred. He got to know Feiga more closely in no time, and they got married before Avrum was to demobilize. Of course, this was a real Jewish wedding in a special building, there was a chuppah and a special chair for the bride. [Editor’s note: in smaller towns in Belarus where the majority of population was Jewish they had special community halls for family celebrations.]

My grandfather returned to Odessa with his young wife in 1894 or 1895. This is all I know about the part of our family from Grodno. My grandmother had brothers, but I don’t know how many there were of them or their names. Avrum went to work upholstering furniture, and Feiga, as they say nowadays, joined in the family business. She owned a stand selling oriental ‘Colonial sweets’ such as rakhat-lukum, khalva, sugar almonds, candied fruits, etc. She had little education that she got at home: she could read and write in Russian and Yiddish so-so, but she could calculate nicely and was successful in her trade.

My grandmother was a beautiful woman and a good housewife. She knew customs and rules, spoke Yiddish and worked hard, but she didn't have a happy life. She became a widow at the age of 44. My grandfather died of typhus at the age of 48 in August 1920 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa according to traditions. My grandmother loved her sons and grandchildren dearly. Her children were the most beautiful, talented and intelligent in the world. My grandmother died in 1952 in Lvov where the family came to live after the Great Patriotic War 4 when they returned from evacuation in Alma-Ata. She was 76. She was buried in the Jewish sector of the town cemetery in Lvov according to the Jewish customs.

Grandmother Feiga had six sons. One son died in infancy, and five survived and grew up. The sons attended cheder in their childhood. They studied the basics of Judaism, could read prayers, went to the synagogue on holidays, knew Yiddish and spoke it at home, but like most Odessites, they spoke a mixed language: a terrible mixture of Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish. When the situation improved and the family could afford to send them to a grammar school, it didn't make them educated people. What was common for all brothers was that they tried to not work at state enterprises, but rather preferred to work individually. [Editor's note: during the NEP 5 and afterward some people in the USSR were involved in handicraft production: shoemakers, tailors, embroidery craftswomen, toy and jewelry manufacturers. They obtained licenses and paid taxes for permission to sell their products at markets.]

My father's older brother Iosif – he was called Juzia at home – was born in 1898. He didn't leave a good memory of himself. Though it is not allowed to speak badly of the deceased, he was remembered to be a tough, greedy man dictating his rules to his brothers and his family. He was a despot. He was a skilled leather handler at an enterprise, and later as a private businessman. He was wealthy since leather handling was a good craft, but he never supported his relatives, even at the hardest time.

His first wife, a Jew called Sonia Basman, died in Odessa before the Great Patriotic War. They had two children: daughter Maria, born in 1919 and son Abram, born in 1923. Maria's husband Victor Lezhanskiy was the director of a big enterprise in Lvov after the war. It was to his credit that the family moved to Lvov after the war.

Iosif remarried in Lvov. His second wife Yelena was 25-28 years younger than him. She was a beautiful Russian woman. He supported her, but when he grew old and fell severely ill, she didn't care about him. She had other men. One of them beat her mercilessly of jealousy and Yelena died from the injuries. Iosif had a son in this marriage. His name is Valentin and he lives in Lvov now. Iosif's son Abram, his wife Sophia and their children – daughter Larisa and son Mikhail – moved to the USA in the middle of the 1970s where Abram died in 1986. Maria died in Lvov in 1991 and her husband Victor Lezhanskiy also passed away.

My father's second brother Grigoriy, born in 1901, was known in the family for having four wives. I even remember their names: Mania, Vera, Riva and Musia. They were all Jews and Grigoriy loved each of them. He was an amorous man. He was a handsome man. He resembled my grandmother. From his second marriage with Vera he had a boy. His name was Israel, but I have absolutely no information about his life. His last wife Musia had a daughter. Her name was Concordia. They lived in Saratov [today Russia] before the war. Like the other brothers, Grigoriy dealt in craftsmanship, something to do with shoemaking. During the war Grigoriy was at the front where he perished on

6th May 1945 in Germany. My father was thinking of visiting his grave for many years. He even had an invitation to Germany, but he never went there.

My father's third brother Solomon – Jewish name Shulim – was born in 1903. He was a specialist in shoe painting; before the war he worked at the shoe factory in Odessa. During the war he was in Saratov in evacuation and he stayed there after the war. He painted shoes as a private craftsman. While working at the factory Solomon was exposed to hazardous acetone and had lung problems. He was married twice: his wives' names were Tsylia and Milia. I met his second wife, with whom he moved to his brothers in Lvov, when he was a pensioner. Solomon died in 1987. He had no children.

The youngest brother Aizik – he was called Izia at home – was born in 1910. He was the most enterprising of all the brothers. We were the closest with him and his family, and he and I were friends. Every time he had different ideas. At first he thought of becoming a photographer and he arranged a 'Photo salon' that was a small room with a garden bench in it and decorations of all kinds to take photos with the mountains, sea or a waterfall in the background. He also painted over the pictures with different colors.

His wife was Shprintsia Ostritskaya, a Jew from Odessa. He had four sons and a daughter. The older son Yakov lived near Odessa. He had diabetes and was very ill. Now his wife Flora and daughters Lilia and Maria live in Odessa. His second son Mikhail was killed in Lvov. He was a troublesome person. He had a strange life, nobody knows any details, but he probably didn't live an honest life. Once he disappeared and later it turned out that he was murdered. This is all the information available. The third son Grigoriy is very smart. He moved to Los Angeles, America, in the 1970s. Their daughter Lilia lives in Israel and her son Felix also lives there.

The youngest son Vladimir moved to Germany in the middle of the 1990s. He has two children: son Sergey living in Israel is married, and daughter Yelena lives in Germany. Vladimir finished a college, worked as a railroad engineer for a long time, then life became unbearable – he got a very low salary at the railroad, and he went to work in private business. He had a tourist and a commercial company, but then he closed them and moved to Germany with his wife. His wife Irina is Russian. She is a teacher. They live near Baden-Baden in Germany.

My father Boris – Jewish name Ber – Bashmet was the fourth son of Avrum and Feiga. He was born in 1905. My father studied in cheder and then began to study in a grammar school, which he never finished. My father had little education and wrote with mistakes in Russian. His older brother tried to involve him in his business, but my father separated from him.

My father was very handy and had smart ideas. He knew that after the horrors of the Civil War 6 people would like to decorate their homes, he modified an embroidery needle, with which people could embroider rugs, pillow cases and tablecloths with color threads. The pattern was imprinted on cloth, and the needle was used to make little tight knots that made the embroidery look very fancy. These needles were in great demand. He was an entrepreneur, as they call it now, he had a patent and paid taxes. A financial inspector [state officer responsible for identification of illegal businesses] visited him, and he filled in taxation forms.

The family was not poor. My father was a breadwinner his whole life. He liked working for himself. He didn't want to be subject to tough discipline at work. When the weather was bad, he stayed at

home making his needles and later he went to the market to sell them. He always paid taxes on time. He didn't want to have any problems with the authorities. He was very independent. He started working at the age of 15, after he lost his father, in the middle of the Civil War. Life was miserable in Odessa in those years.

Boris Bashmet was a very kind man. When he was 20, he met Tsylia Birstein. She was the same age as he. He always shared his food with her. She never had sufficient food and needed support. They met in a company of young people. They got married in 1925. They just had a civil ceremony registering their marriage. After the revolution of 1917 7, religious weddings were not popular.

I know very little about my ancestors on my mother's side. My grandfather's name was Chaim Birstein. I don't know his date of birth, though I guess it may have been in the 1860s, or occupation. They lived in Odessa and had a better education than the Bashmet family. Their children finished a grammar school. There is one photo of my grandmother Etl Berstein. Her nickname was 'De sheine' – 'the most beautiful' in Yiddish. My mother's sister Lisa moved to Buenos Aires in Argentina in 1910. Her older brother Haime moved to London in England in 1912, and we lost track of them for good. I think they must have been born in the 1880s. My mother was a little girl then and remembered them dimly.

In 1919 my mother's parents died of typhus. My mother went to live with her older sister Yevgenia, born in 1887. Her husband Vladimir Lipshitz came from a poor family in Odessa. He was an enthusiastic revolutionary in the underground. In 1916 he moved abroad escaping from the tsarist police. He returned after the revolution of 1917 and held many leading posts. He was a ruthless man and had his principles. He believed everybody had to support himself. My mother didn't have a good life with them.

In 1925 Lipshitz got a job in Moscow. At one time he was deputy minister of the meat industry of a republic and then became director of a big factory. In 1937 he was arrested 8 like many other revolutionaries and he disappeared for a long time. When he was released from prison, he was not allowed to reside in Moscow. This separated him from the family.

Yevgenia had three sons. One of them, David, was an artist, and so was another, whose name I don't remember. Marat, the youngest, was eager to go to the front in 1941. He was under the recruitment age, but he managed to get enrolled. He perished in the first month of the war. Yevgenia died in 1967.

My mother studied in a grammar school. She loved music, literature, theater and art. My mother's family must have spoken Yiddish among themselves. My mother could speak it well. The family was probably not so religious. My mother didn't go to synagogue or lit candles on Saturday. We observed some traditions and on Pesach my mother made some dishes from matzah, but this was merely all. As far as I know, the family traditionally bought their children new clothes before holidays.

After the revolution my mother finished a secondary school. She was good at music and had a good voice. She entered the Vocal Faculty of Odessa Conservatory, but she only studied two years there. The hard conditions of her life at her sister's, lack of food forced her to give up her studies. She did the laundry and worked as a baby sitter as much as she could to earn at least something. In 1925 her sister's family moved to Moscow. My mother didn't have anybody to seek support in Odessa,

when she met the young, interesting and reliable Boris Bashmet, who was her rescue.

At first my parents were renting a room before they got a room of their own in Knizhny Lane in Odessa where I was born in 1926. I remember our yard surrounded by two- and three-storied houses with many apartments and many tenants in them. There was a common toilet in a corner in the yard. In the middle of this yard there was a big branchy tree. It seemed huge to me then. Most of the tenants were Jewish. There was one old Greek man, a shoemaker, with his wife, and a couple of Russian families.

I remember Tsynishin. He worked in the shipyard and was a Stakhanovets. [Editor's note: this title was awarded to the workers who displayed advanced performance, exceeding their work scopes during a shift.] He received a good salary, bonuses, gifts, but he was an unrestrained drunkard. I remember his drunk yelling and anti-Semitic demonstrations. In the morning he made the rounds of apartments to apologize for his conduct. He was the poorest man in our neighborhood. There were also educated families. The son of one such family was my friend, Sokolovskiy, a very talented boy. He was about two years older than me. He perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War.

There were many routinely rows in the yard: one housewife began telling off another housewife for rushing up somebody's laundry getting dry on a line, somebody's child walked somewhere wrong, somebody left a door open and so on. These rows were actually like theatrical performances. My mother never got involved in such rows. She got along with the neighbors and didn't come into conflict with people in general. She had a good sense of humor. The others respected her for her voice. She used to sing romances or songs popular in the 1920-30s. When the weather was warm, housewives did their cooking on primus stoves in the yard. [Primus stove: a small portable stove with a container for about 1 liter of kerosene that was pumped into burners.] They also did their laundry, washed their children or themselves in washtubs. There was a pump in the center of the yard and tenants fetched water in buckets.

Childhood

Our apartment consisted of one 17-square meter room and a 10-12 square meter kitchen. The front door led to the kitchen from the yard. There was a wood or coal-stoked stove in the corner of the kitchen that served for cooking and heating. There was a basement in the house where we had a cell to keep vegetables. There were two windows in the room, a wardrobe, beds and a mirror on the wall – this was all, I think. There were carpets on the walls that my father made.

My mother was crazy about cleanliness and we had to watch ourselves to keep things clean. Everything was white: the tablecloth, napkins and cover sheets. My mother often whitewashed the stove. She cooked delicious traditional food. I remember the monotony of similar dishes: Jewish stew, chicken broth with beans and boiled cereals. Our family liked sharp tasting dishes: ground radishes with oil and onions, herring and sauerkraut, and we always had them at meals. My mother made gefilte fish, soup and borsch, but not so often. She cooked egg plants deliciously; they were popular in Odessa: she stewed them ground with vegetables, filled them with carrots and onions and pickled them. My mother also baked strudels and cookies. We had water melons and melons till late autumn.

My mother also made dishes with matzah on Pesach. We bought matzah at the synagogue every year and brought it home in a tin tub called ‘balia.’ My father went to buy matzah at the synagogue. He sometimes took me with him, but my mother never went to the synagogue. My mother bought a chicken to cook it for dinner on Pesach. We had a special dinner, but we didn’t have any special crockery for Pesach. My father went to the synagogue on other holidays: Simchat Torah for sure. He had a prayer book, tallit and other accessories for praying. I remember the synagogue on holidays, the candle light, everybody dancing, but my father didn’t take me inside. We, boys, watched it through holes in the fence.

Before I turned eight, I was only allowed to play in the yard. My mother even beat me or punished me making me stand in a corner, if I left the yard. She was afraid of bad influence of hooligans, ‘shpana’ as they were called in Odessa. When I turned eight, my parents used to send me to buy bread in a shop. I hardly ever went out with my parents. They were busy at work and I spent my time playing with other children in the yard.

We lived in Knizhny Lane that was called so due to the nice building of the library in the center of it. When I turned ten, I began to borrow books from this library. My mother read a lot and we had many books at home: my mother read Russian and world classics and was also fond of detective stories. I remember a story teller in Odessa. His surname was Haimovich and he always told sensations and news. There were always rumors that either a comet would fly by, or a meridian had broken and they spread fast and then there were books on this subject written. We could also borrow books from him: he charged 2-3 rubles for 3-4 days.

My mother loved opera and ballet, and she took me with her to the theater. I remember how I admired the luxury of the Opera Theater. My father never went with us. He read newspapers and magazines, but I never remember him discussing what he had read. My father had a simple attitude toward the Soviet power. He had a saying: ‘never ask the tsar for anything better.’ My father belonged to the people who understood that they had to earn their living and food, and everything else was all right. My father worked, worked and worked. He sold what he made at the Privoz market where he had a folding table, a frame where he embroidered and a display board where he had all these embroideries. However, he didn’t like to sell his articles. Sometimes, he made carpets by orders.

He had days off on Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November [9] and on Jewish holidays. My father didn’t work on Saturday. He didn’t take part in politics. Before 7th November my father went to an artist to have him paint ‘Long live 7th November’ or ‘20th anniversary of October.’ My father embroidered these paintings and sold the rugs. The Soviet power only appeared in our house in the person of a financial inspector, but my father found a common language with him. He got along well with people. I also knew how to develop a tax declaration, when I went to school.

My parents had their friends who got together to play cards and lotto in our home. They also sang Jewish and popular songs. My father knew many songs. Most of their friends were Jews. We had a record player and many records. In summer my parents put it on the window sill and opened the window and then everybody in the yard could hear the music. Later we got a radio, a big one. This was the first radio set in our yard and I was very proud of it.

In 1933 there was famine [10], I remember it well: we were miserably poor then. I remember that my mother and father had golden rings and they took them to the Torgsin store [11] to buy bread or

something else. My father even had to take our pillows to sell them at the market. My father went to work at the garment factory. We didn't have coal or wood to heat the apartment. I fell ill with measles. It created complications with my eyes: I had a squint, poor sight and long sight. I even couldn't go to school at the age of seven: my parents decided I needed to get better.

A year later life began to improve. To prepare me for school my mother decided to send me to a Froebel tutor 12 who had finished a Froebel school before the revolution of 1917. There was a group of children. She taught us to read and write in Russian. She was a Jew, Faina Markovna, an intelligent woman. She was very good at teaching children. We sang and learned poems, went for walks in parks, and in the evening she took us to our homes. We had our snacks with us and our Froebel tutor watched that we ate what we had with us.

I went to the second grade of a Russian secondary school for boys and girls. There were many Jewish children in my class. Our class tutor was a Jew, a kind woman. Nobody distinguished us by nationality. Like everybody else I became a young Octobrist 13, and then a pioneer 14. I don't remember anything special about the admission ceremonies, probably, I didn't care much. I was an active pioneer. I issued our class wall newspapers, one to the 100th anniversary of Pushkin 15, and also recited poems at concerts. I had friends, we used to play football on a ground near school. My friend Sokolovskiy and I took part in contests at school. One of them was called 'Years and towns,' and we read encyclopedias and maps to be able to answer questions. I studied well in the junior grades, but then I was less successful. Mathematic was a difficult subject for me.

In 1935, on 17th February my sister was born. This was a grand event in our life. I even made a calendar and marked that she was born at 10 o'clock. My sister was named Emma, it was close to my mother's name Etl. She was a lovely fair girl, everybody liked her and she loved all.

My father quit his job at the factory and worked at home. Besides, he and Aizik worked together making color pictures, painted cards and sold them. They were in great demand at the Privoz.

In 1937 I was an eleven-year-old boy. We believed everything at school and on the radio unconditionally. We didn't doubt it that Stalin would protect us against enemies and traitors. My friend and I removed portraits of enemies of the people 16, devoted communists, recent legendary commanders, favorites of the people, who had only recently been our idols, from books. They told us at school and on the radio that this person was an enemy of the people and that one was a murderer, and we believed it without going into detail.

This subject was not discussed at home, but there were talks about the war. We knew about the horrific war in Europe. We didn't know any details, what Hitler was doing to Jews, but we understood there was bloodshed and towns on fire. In 1939 people said there was going to be a war in 1940, in 1940 they said there was to be a war in 1941. These were mere talks for me, and only when bombs began to fall on us, we realized this was the war.

During the war

I remember well the day of 22nd June 1941. In the morning we heard the roar of planes and heard the firing. We ran outside. We were terribly scared. The thing is, there was a raid on Odessa on the first day of the war and then there was a month of quiet. My father was called to the military office; he was subject to recruitment. There was an order to take all radios to the officials. We wrapped

our radio set in a pillow case and sewed it on. We obtained a document to get it back later, but this never happened, of course.

Institutions and organizations began to evacuate. Our family didn't hope to leave the town. Uncle Aizik's friend, who worked in a railroad office, was responsible for the evacuation of equipment of a plant and had a railcar at his disposal to evacuate the family. He took my uncle's family and us into this railcar. Our trip in the overcrowded freight railcar lasted over two months before we finally arrived in Central Asia. We had a suitcase of clothes, a record player and few records with us. There were many Jews from Bessarabia 17 in the railcar. They spoke Yiddish and I actually learned the language there.

People were getting off the train wherever they wanted. My uncle's family got off in Saratov, but later they joined us in Central Asia. My mother was so scared that she decided to go as far as the train took us. So we arrived in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, about 3300 km from Kiev. Alma-Ata is an interesting town, but our life there was very hard. At first a Jewish family gave us shelter. We slept on the floor for a few months.

My mother rented an apartment from a very rude Kazakh man living in the suburb of the city. There was no wood to stoke the stove. There was a tree, a saxaul, in the yard, where I used to spend hours waiting for our landlord to drop me a branch from it. My little sister was ill, my mother worked as a cloakroom janitor in a theater and we received bread cards 18.

I went to the eighth grade at school. There were terrible anti-Semitic demonstrations in Alma-Ata and there was no escape from it. The main subject of it was that Jews were staying in the rear rather than going to the front. [Editor's note: Many people evacuated to Central Asia during the Great Patriotic War, including many Jewish families. Many people had an idea that all Jewish population was in evacuation rather than at the front and anti-Semites spoke about it in mocking tones.] Russians talked about it at markets endlessly, though I never heard any Kazakh talking about it. I kept my father's photograph that he had sent us from the front with me as evidence that there were Jews at the front.

My Jewish name Abram [Jewish names were targets of mockery, vulgar jokes and often exclusion at the time] provoked all kinds of trouble for me, and my mother and I decided to change it to Arkadiy without making any changes in my documents. Since then I've been called Arkadiy at school, college, work and home.

My mother was very concerned about me fearing that I would have to go to the front, when I became of age. Frankly speaking, I had no desire to go to the front. My sight became so poor in Alma-Ata that it was impossible to find proper glasses for me. The medical commission attested me as 'not fit for military service,' but my mother kept worrying. She often cried, my sister was ill and my father disappeared and we didn't know anything about him.

My father was a private in anti-tank troops. He was in captivity, and he was wounded and had to stay in hospital. Near Stalingrad he was sent to a village riding a horse. There he was captured by Germans and they intended to shoot him. A Russian reported on him saying: 'But he is a Jew,' and Germans were going to kill him, but my father managed to escape. My father hid on a stove and the Germans were too busy to look for him.

When the village was liberated, my father was sent to a punitive company being a former prisoner-of-war. At that time prisoners-of-war were treated as traitors. He was wounded by a mine and taken to a hospital. There were splinters from this mine in his legs for a long time, and he also lost few fingers. When he was discharged from this hospital in 1944, he came to us in Alma-Ata. He arrived walking on crutches. He decided to learn to ride a bicycle and it took him a long time. We had to help him on and off the bicycle since he could hardly move at first.

By this time Uncle Aizik, his family and Grandmother Feiga moved in with us. My father and his younger brother obtained a license for making candy. They rented a facility, purchased sugar and boiled candy using some interesting technology. They boiled sugar, added color agents, poured this mass into pans and cut it. Then they cooled, dried, sugar powdered and sold them. They also made ice cream for sale. My uncle had a stand at the market. They also bought gauze, colored it and made curtains. They also painted cards. My father was very handy.

Alma-Ata became a cultural center during the war: many Moscow theaters, cinema studios and popular art activists evacuated there. Uncle Aizik went to work as a scenery laborer at the musical comedy theater and always took me to rehearsals with him. The Moscow Jewish Theater was also in this building, and it was all very interesting. There were many Jewish performances in Yiddish. I remember ‘The Wandering Stars’ and ‘Tevye the Milkman’ by Sholem Aleichem 19. There was a beautiful Opera Theater where we often went. I met my first love in Alma-Ata: she was Clara, a Jewish girl. Her father was a high ranking official in a ministry. I met her in a company of young people. She was a theater-goer and took me with her.

I had finished school by then, passed my exam externally since I hardly ever attended classes. There was a theater for children and teens created in Kazakhstan. They were hiring actors and I went there immediately. I passed all exams, sketches and music tests, and they admitted me to the preparatory group. However, when it came to the issue of my employment at the theater my mother was sobbing bitterly. The theater didn’t release you from army service and she was afraid that I might be recruited despite my poor sight.

So I went to the preparatory course at the Railroad College that provided a release from army service and a bread card for 800 grams bread per day while other cards were for 400 grams. This all played a significant role. I wouldn’t say that I disliked this profession and regret that it happened so. During my first year, when there were general subjects, I didn’t like them and spent more time organizing concerts and so on. Later I got fond of the automation subject. I defended my diploma well. Though I never became an outstanding specialist, I became a good engineer.

The 9th of May 1945, the Victory Day 20, was a very happy, but also a sad day for our family. The day before we received a notification that my father’s brother Grigoriy had perished. My father and Aizik were in no hurry to return home to start everything anew on the ruins.

Marriage and children

In 1946 my college was transferred to Leningrad. I had finished two years of studies and went to Leningrad with my college. I got accommodation in a hostel. We admired the theaters, museums and the highest cultural level of people in Leningrad. I was very fond of attending the amateur art club where I played in the amateur theater and was particularly good at playing strong characters.

I met my future wife Maya Krechiver in the college theater. She wanted to be an actress and loved theater, but she never managed to realize her dream. She studied in Leningrad University and became a philologist.

Maya was born in Kiev in 1926. Her father Zelik Krechiver, born in 1896, an old communist, worked as chief of the planning department of the Ministry of Light Industry. Her mother Daria Shapchenko, born in 1908, very young, 16-17 years old, a beautiful Ukrainian woman, was a cleaning woman in this ministry and that was where they met and got married. Later she finished a college and became a design artist. Maya was their only child, but before the war her parents separated.

When the war began, her father before going to the front, made his daughter sit on his lap, gave her some money and clothes and said, 'Go to Molotov [present Perm, Russia, 900 km from Moscow]' where his brother and sister lived. Her mother was the director of a museum in Lubny [Ukraine, 200 km from Kiev]. She must have perished during another raid. There is no information about what happened to her. The father perished at the front defending Kiev in 1941. Maya stayed with her father's sister in Perm. Aunt Revekka and her husband Boris Yelentuh became Maya's family, and later they became family for me. Maya and I often saw each other. Her uncle was deputy director of the college and had an apartment in the hostel where I resided. We often went to the theater.

My parents remained in Alma-Ata till 1949. I went to visit them on vacations. My trip lasted six days, and I got a cheap ticket to sleep on the third-tier berth since I couldn't afford to buy a more expensive ticket. My father also visited me in Leningrad and stayed with me at the hostel.

By the time of finishing college Maya and I already knew that we wanted to live our life together. At the end of 1948 we had our marriage registered in the registry office, and in the evening Aunt Revekka arranged a small dinner party. I got a job assignment 21 to Siberia. Maya's uncle Boris pulled some strings for me. He was logistics manager of our college. At the very last moment I got another job assignment to the Northern Caucasian railroad, to the Russian town of Rostov-on-the-Don, 920 km from Kiev.

They were to provide an apartment to the young specialist, but instead, they rented one for me. Maya stayed to study in Leningrad. We corresponded, she came to me on vacations and I went to see her in Leningrad. She defended her diploma brilliantly in 1949, and she was already pregnant. On 3rd July 1949 our first son Yevgeniy was born.

Sometime later I went to Leningrad to take my wife and son to Rostov-on-the-Don. We got an apartment in a former office building on the bank of the Don. There was no bathroom or hot water in the apartment, but at that time hardly anybody lived with comforts. I worked in a railroad office. There were not many Jewish employees there. However, I remember these polemics and resolutions in the course of the struggle against cosmopolitism 22. It might seem that it had hardly anything to do with us in the technical environment, but my wife and I were very concerned at this period.

Then came another burst called the Doctors' Plot 22. It was necessary to join the party to make a career. I submitted my application, but they refused to admit me and explained that Jews could not be trusted. I remember that my colleagues stopped visiting doctors, and my manager used to

repeat, ‘How do we go to a doctor now?’ There was a hostile attitude and distrust. Later, when it stopped after Stalin died, I remember the disappointment of those who appreciated this process.

Maya worked at school a little. On 24th January 1953 our son Yuri was born. Stalin’s death on 5th March 1953 wasn’t a big event for us. We spent all our time with little Yuri. Of course, we were concerned about what was to happen in the future, but I always remembered what our father said, ‘Don’t ask the tsar for anything better,’ and didn’t expect anything good from this regime. We lived our own life. We played in an amateur theater in Rostov. There was a good producer and what we did was quite serious. I went to work at a design institute and found this job more interesting. There were more Jewish employees there, but I didn’t notice any prejudiced attitudes.

By 1950 the Bashmet family gradually reunited in Lvov. Victor Lezhanskiy, the son-in-law of my father’s older brother Iosif, was director of a big enterprise in Lvov, and in the first years after the war it was easy to get an apartment here, and he helped all of them to get apartments and they moved to Lvov.

In 1952 my grandmother Feiga Bashmet died. She was very old and lived the end of her life with her younger son Aizik. My father continued making needles in Lvov and they were in demand. My mother was very ill. She always had a weak heart, but then she fell ill with cancer of the blood and glands. She died in late 1956. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Lvov. My father and 20-year-old Emma were left on their own. I realized that I had to support them and got a transfer to a similar design institute in Lvov. At that time we had a two-room apartment in Rostov that we exchanged for an apartment in Lvov in 1957.

In Lvov I climbed the career ladder promptly. In the 1960-1970s I worked as deputy director of the design institute. When our director died, everybody believed that I was to become director. The chief of the railroad department had a discussion with me and seemed to like what he heard, but later I was expressly told that the party district committee didn’t approve me due to my nationality. During the Soviet time a candidate for any official post was to be approved by the Communist Party district, town or central committees. So I remained to be deputy director of this institute. Many times I heard the others saying about me that I was a good specialist and a good man despite my being a Jew. When our institute was closed, I went to work at the railroad production site. I was chief engineer and when I became a pensioner, I stayed to work there as a dispatcher.

In 1957, when we moved to Lvov, Yevgeniy was eight. He went to the first grade here. Yuri was four years old. They grew up like all other Soviet children. They were pioneers and Komsomol [24] members and they were atheists, of course. Our boys were very different: if Yuri was born on a sunny day, Yevgeniy was born on a cloudy night. He studied at school poorly and always got involved in incidents. He was very musical and we decided to teach him to play the accordion. We bought an expensive accordion, but Yevgeniy didn’t want to play. We had to sell his accordion for peanuts.

He hardly managed to finish nine classes at school and went to serve in the army. By that time he learned to play the guitar, and in the army he played in a band. He served in a construction battalion in the Crimea. Once he fell asleep in a trench, caught a cold that developed into pleurisy and came home. We arranged for the medical treatment and sent him to a health center in the Crimea where he continued to play the guitar. Then he returned and played in bands, one and another, and then I made all arrangements for him to study in the railroad technical school. He was

even admitted without exams. He left it after studying three years.

He married a woman with a five-year old daughter. Her name is Angela. It didn't matter that his wife Nina Yeliseeva was not Jewish, but what mattered was that they didn't get along. In 1986 their daughter Maria was born. Yevgeniy worked as a driver, then was a conductor in an orchestra, an entrepreneur, but nothing really worked out. Two years ago he moved to Germany with his family. Maria finished a choreographic college here and studies in a grammar school in Germany. She is a good girl.

We knew that Yuri had a talent for music since he was a child. He loved listening to records and later he learned to play the guitar by himself. Grandfather Boris gave him his first guitar. Maya sent him to a music school. We needed to buy a musical instrument for him. The cheapest instrument was a violin, so we bought him one and later we bought a piano. Yuri studied in a general school for the first four years and in the evening he had classes in the music school.

After finishing the fourth grade he went to study in the music school. He didn't give up playing the guitar either. Some of his friends told him that it was easier to play the guitar and he didn't have to spend all his time like he did playing the violin. The violin class was too full and teachers suggested that Yuri went to the class of viola players. They always offered viola to unsuccessful violin players. They asked my son, 'Will you learn to play the viola?', but he didn't care – he didn't know what it was like. We didn't know it either. One musician whom we knew said, 'It doesn't matter what instrument you play: it's important how you play it.' It decided it all.

For a couple of years, in the fifth and sixth grades he continued to play the violin since he needed to have a stronger hand to be able to play the viola. In the seventh grade he started to play the viola. He played drills from morning till night and our neighbors were crazy about it, but he liked it and he was responsible. Other people paid their attention to Yuri and serious musicians took part in arranging his future. So he's become the number one viola player in the world and an outstanding musician, and there have been about 50 pieces written for viola and for him, Yuri Bashmet.

He is very fond of playing the piano and plays it wonderfully. Yuri is also known as an outstanding conductor now. His wife Nathalia is a violinist. Their daughter Ksenia, born in 1980, is a pianist. She is married to Dmitriy Bulgakov, an oboe player. Their son Alexandr, born in 1986, declared there were too many musicians in the family already. He studies at the College of International Relations.

Yuri lives in Moscow and goes on tours to many countries. His schedule is busy for a few years ahead. Besides, Yuri is a public person. He takes part in many events: music festivals, contests, etc. In many interviews my son mentions his family. He says he had 'a great mother,' who took every effort to make him what he is now. He recalls Grandfather Boris with whom he was very close. He remembered that his grandfather used to send him a little money till his last days: 'Young people always want something.'

Though our boys have been so different they've always been close to one another. They went to pioneer camps together and played in bands. Music tied them together. Yuri has always acknowledged that Yevgeniy is talented. My sons were raised knowing their Jewish spirit. They could pick up their grandfather or my jokes in Yiddish. They fought the neighbor's children, when they heard their anti-Semitic expressions or teasing. When Yuri studied in the music school in Lvov, most of his classmates were Jewish, and so was their class tutor, a teacher of physics. This teacher

humiliated the boys, gave them lower marks and told them off, so that the others did not suspect him in supporting his own kin. There were Jews, who were most of all afraid of being suspected of being Jews.

In 1969 my sister Emma died. She was young. I always loved her. She was an amazing person, kind and fair and never recognized the evil. Regretfully Emma was single. She was very ill. She had an ulcer in her stomach, consequences of the war and poor food. She was a philologist and worked in the library. She was very fond of Pushkin. She loved her nephews, my children, and spent a lot of time with them.

When the children were at school, my wife Maya was a housewife. To add to the family budget she made clothes at home. She had her clients. Later, when the children grew older, she went to work at the conservatory where she was chief dispatcher of the curriculum department. She did very well at work and her colleagues respected her. She worked till her last days. She had heart problems. Maya died from a stroke in 1985. I lost my big friend and a very close person. The two parts of her – the Slavic and Judaic ones – were in harmony in her, she never liked pressure on one or the other side. She hated anti-Semitism and didn't like the Orthodox Jewish demonstrations, disregard or disrespect of other nations. She raised our children to share her vision.

My father was growing older and couldn't work any longer. He received a pension of an invalid of the Great Patriotic War. I often went to see him and we talked a lot. He told me much about the history of the Bashmet family. He died at the age of 87 in 1992. I have his prayer book, tallit and some other religious accessories. He went to the synagogue in Lvov, and to pay my respects to him I go to the synagogue four times, during readings of the prayer of commemoration of parents.

Recent years

I was enthusiastic about perestroika 25. I believed that it was the right turn. I couldn't imagine the fall of the Soviet Union. Like any other manager I propagated the Soviet way of life, conducted political classes and said things that even I knew were lies. Sooner or later this propaganda had to fall apart, the things were getting worse and worse. I saluted the independence of Ukraine. I believed that every nation must have a state, but I could never guess that this independence would result in what we have now. This nationalism is not normal, I don't understand how people can be so intolerant to others.

I've traveled to Israel three times. My son Yuri paid for my trips. This is a wonderful country, exotic, but still it is not mine. I don't remember my reaction when Israel was established – it was far away from me, but now that I've been there, I understand how wonderful it is that there is this country, there is the land and the state.

However, I live my life here. I don't even want to move to Moscow, though Yuri has a nice house out of the city and a nice five-bedroom apartment in the center of Moscow with all comforts, etc. Why would I need it? I have my friends and I am at home here. I meet with my old friends. I have a woman friend here, we see each other, she has a daughter and a family, but we meet when we can and go to theaters or listen to music.

I often read lectures in the Hesed 26 about Yuri's creative activities, show videos of my son's concerts. I have 25 video tapes. Since I am an old man living alone, Hesed helps me with cleaning

the apartment and doing the laundry, but they treat me like they do everybody else. I try to observe traditions that my father developed in me, but of course, I am not religious. I am just interested in the history of the Jewish people and I am an active person. Yiddish helps me – I can understand what people say and can talk.

Glossary:

1 Yuri Bashmet (b
1953): Bashmet became the youngest person ever to be appointed to a professorship at the Moscow Conservatoire. In 1976, Bashmet won first prize at the International Viola Competition in Munich, which launched his international career. Sony Classical released his first recording for the label this past autumn - an arrangement for viola and string orchestra of Brahms' Clarinet Quintet and Shostakovich's Quartet No.13 performed with the Moscow Soloists. In 1992 Bashmet began working with a new group, Moscow Soloists, which he directs himself. This group is composed of musicians nominated by professors at the Moscow Conservatoire as the cream of the new generation of string players. The Moscow Soloists have been rapturously received in Moscow, Athens, Amsterdam, Paris and at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London.

2 Annexation of Eastern Poland
According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the Belarusian Soviet Republics..

3 Odessa
A town in Ukraine on the Black Sea coast. One of the largest industrial, cultural, scholarly and resort centers in Ukraine. Founded in the 15th century in the place of the Tatar village Khadjibey. In 1764 the Turks built the fortress Eni-Dunia near that village. After the Russian-Turkish war in 1787-91 Odessa was taken by Russia and the town was officially renamed Odessa. Under the rule of Herzog Richelieu (1805-1814) Odessa became the chief town in Novorossiya province. On 17th January 1918 Soviet rule was established in the town. During World War II, from August - October 1941, the town defended itself heroically from the German attacks.

4 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.

5 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.

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 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.

11 Torgsin stores

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

12 Froebel Institute

F. W. A. Froebel (1783-1852), German educational theorist, developed the idea of raising children in kindergartens. In Russia the Froebel training institutions functioned from 1872-1917 The three-year training was intended for tutors of children in families and kindergartens.

13 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

14 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.

15 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

16 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

17 Bessarabia

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldova.

18 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.

19 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich) (1859-1916)

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poems in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Milkman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

20 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

21 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

22 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.'

23 Doctors’ Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

24 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.

25 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By

1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

26 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.