

# Dora Puchalskaya

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Ternopol

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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*Dora Puchalskaya likes to wear warm woolen sweaters that she knitted herself and knitted leggings. Dora lives in a big three-room apartment alone: her older son Anatoli died recently after being ill for 17 years. Dora is in mourning, but she met me with pleasure. There is plain furniture in Dora's apartment, but she has gorgeous embroidered pictures on the walls that she made herself. Dora embroidered sitting by her son's bed in the evenings. She feels lonely and deserted after she lost her son. A nice downy cat Tom that Dora bought as a present on 8 March follows his mistress wherever she walks. He is Dora's only consolation. Dora has a friend in the Jewish community and her neighbors also come to see and support her. Dora makes pastries and they have tea and talk about life for hours. Dora also spends a lot of time knitting and embroidering.*

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## Family background

My maternal and paternal ancestors came from Litin, an old district town in Vinnitsa province. I've never been in Litin, but my mother told me that the beginning of the 20th century its population was about ten thousand people. Almost half of them were Jews. There was Ukrainian, Russian and Polish population involved in farming for the most part. Jews dealt in crafts and trade like everywhere else within the Pale of settlement [1](#) of the Russian Empire. They were tailors, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, glasscutters. There was a synagogue in the center of the town, where most Jewish families traditionally resided.

My father's parents Yakov (Yankel in the Jewish manner) and Riva Gitman lived in the center. They were born in Litin in the 1880s. They got married some time in 1905. Their wedding was prearranged by a matchmaker, which was customary for Jewish families. I don't have any information about their families or my grandmother's maiden name. The only education my grandfather had was cheder. He was a high skilled tailor. He made men's and women's clothes and provided well for his family. My grandparents had five children. Grandmother Riva was a housewife. My father told me that they observed all traditions and followed kashrut. They observed Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My grandfather didn't work on Saturday. My grandmother and grandfather went to synagogue on Saturday and high holidays and fasted on the Day of Atonement. My grandfather wore a hat or a cap and my grandmother wore a kerchief that was a customs with Jews. However, they were not fanatically religious. My father and his brothers studied at cheder.

Their parents gave their children an opportunity to determine their priorities in life and make up their own decisions. My father later they gave up religion.

Shmul Gitman, the oldest brother, who was affectionately called Shmilyk at home, was born around 1906. After the revolution of 1917 [2](#) Shmul finished a Pedagogical School and worked as a teacher at a secondary school in Litin and then in Zhmerinka where he moved after he got married in the 1930s. Shmul was recruited to the army on the first days of the Great Patriotic War [3](#). He never returned home from the war and we don't know when, where or how he perished. His wife, whose name I don't remember, and their three children – sons Abram and Efim and daughter Maria, born in the 1930s, were in evacuation in Tomsk [about 2,000 km from Kiev]. Abram and Efim stayed in Siberia. From there they moved to Israel in the late 1970s. They finished colleges and became chemical engineers. Maria and her mother returned to Zhmerinka after the war. Maria and her family also live in Israel, also from the late 1970s. They occasionally send me greetings on holidays. I know that they are pleased with their life.

The next child Fania was born in 1908. Fania didn't have any education. She married a Jewish man who dealt in trade. His name was Abram Kipnis. Fania was a housewife. During the Great Patriotic War Abram, Fania and their daughters Raisa, Anna and Mara were in evacuation in Bugulma [about 3,000 km from Kiev]. After the war they lived in Zhmerinka. Fania died in 1980s. Her daughters moved to Israel in late 1980s.

My father's younger sister Bertha – she was usually called Bella –, born in 1912 was everybody's favorite in the family. In the late 1930s she married a Jewish man and moved to Leningrad where her husband lived. In spring 1941 Bella came to Zhmerinka to have her baby. She was there, when the war began. She, grandfather and grandmother and Fania's family evacuated to Bugulma. Fania's son Michael was born there. Bella's husband perished at the front. In 1945 she married her husband's friend who was in love with her. They moved to Leningrad. Bella had her second husband's last name of Geller. In 1946 their son Yakov Geller was born. Bella died in Leningrad in the 1970s. Michael finished a technical school and Yakov finished a College of Economics in Ternopol. They've moved to the USA with their families. I've had no contacts with them.

My father's youngest brother Pinkhus, born in 1915, lived his life in hometown. My father took care about him and called him 'a little finger' affectionately. In early 1941 he came to Vladimir-Volynskiy where our family lived at the time. When the Great Patriotic War began he managed to send his wife and three children between 1-4 years of age in evacuation by train. It turned out later that their train was bombed near Vladimir-Volynskiy and they perished. Pinkhus was in occupation with us. During the war a Ukrainian family gave him shelter. After the war Pinkhus married a Jewish woman. They moved to Poland and from there to the USA. They didn't have children. Pinkhus died in the middle of 1990s.

My father Lazar Gitman was born in Litin in 1910. He finished cheder and after the revolution of 1917 he studied at a Ukrainian secondary school where he met my mother and they became friends. They spent vacations in a pioneer camp and took part in pioneer meetings. They joined Komsomol [4](#) at school. After finishing school my father entered a Road Construction College in Vinnitsa. After finishing this college he returned to Litin and became a road engineer. My mother and father continued seeing each other, although my father's parents were against their marriage. My father's older brother Shmilyk was the first one to get married according to Jews traditions.

Besides, my mother's family was not as wealthy as my father's and my father's parents didn't want him to marry a poor girl.

My maternal grandfather and grandmother Ghedali and Hana Richter also came from Litin. They were born in the late 1880s. I have no information about their families either. All I know is that grandmother Hana had two older brothers that moved to America in 1912 to avoid military service in the tsarist army. I don't remember their names. My mother corresponded with them before the middle of the 1930s until corresponding with relatives abroad became unsafe [keep in touch with relatives abroad [5](#)]. Grandfather Ghedali supplied fruit and vegetables for a tinned food factory before the revolution and during NEP [6](#). He owned a supply company that was nationalized [7](#) after the NEP. He continued working there. They had stocks of pears, apples and nuts in the basement of their house that saved them from hunger at the trying times. These stocks rescued them during famine in 1932-33 [famine in Ukraine] [8](#). Grandfather Ghedali and his family lived in a barrack-type house with another Jewish family. They lighted their house with candles or kerosene lamps and had a stove heating. My grandfather received this apartment from the factory where he worked and my grandparents lived there until the end of 1937. My mother's family was not wealthy. Grandfather earned well, but grandmother Hana had stomach problems. They spent a lot of money on doctors and medications. Probably due to her illness they only had two children: my mother and her younger brother Aron, born in 1915. After finishing school Aron worked as an accountant in a military unit in Lvov. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War he went to the front with his military unit and perished. He got married in early 1941. His Jewish wife, whose name I don't remember, perished during occupation in Zhmerinka.

My mother's parents were religious: they observed kashrut and Sabbath. My grandfather wore a kippah at home and a wide-brimmed hat to go out. My grandmother also wore a kerchief or a lace shawl. My grandfather and grandmother went to synagogue on Saturday and my mother stayed at home to set a festive dinner. They observed all Jewish holidays and fasted at Yom Kippur. They did a major cleanup of the house before Pesach and used special kosher crockery that they kept in the attic during the year. They bought matzah at the synagogue; in the 1930s they made it at home.

My mother Basia Richter was born in Litin in 1913. She was raised to observe the Jewish traditions and religion, but she was growing up during the first Soviet years inspired by the romantic feeling of construction of socialism. My mother studied in a Ukrainian lower secondary school. She said that her parents wanted her to study in a Jewish school, but since many other children went to a Ukrainian school my mother also wanted to study there. My mother was two years younger than my father and they didn't communicate at school. They met in a pioneer camp in summer and had been together ever since. After finishing school my mother studied in a Pedagogical School. She became a primary school teacher. Although my mother was a Komsomol member, she observed Jewish traditions at home from respect of her parents.

After my father returned from Vinnitsa, their feelings toward one another took a new turn and they resumed seeing each other. They wanted to get married and my maternal grandmother Hana approved of this plan. She was very ill and was hoping to live to see her daughter well settled in life. Besides, during the famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine my mother's family starved, even though they had fruit and vegetables in stocks. My mother told me how they made 'bebka', boiled water with a little bit of flour. My mother worked in a primary school and was forced to go to villagers' home with a commission, which purpose was struggle against kulaks [9](#). My mother couldn't help

crying desperately seeing children swollen from hunger and the commission that took away the last piece of bread or jar of corns from them. She couldn't refuse from participation in this commission for the fear of losing her job. My grandmother was hoping that my mother would have a better life with her husband, particularly that my father came from a wealthy family. My father's parents were against their marriage, and my father didn't dare to disobey them. My father's younger brother Pinkhus sympathized with the young couple. He took them by their hands and they went to a registry office where they got married. When they told my father's parents about their marriage my grandmother Riva got so angry that she didn't speak to Pinkhus for few months blaming him for what he had done. She thought that my father would never dare to disobey his parents and she didn't want to accept my mother. She was hoping that my father would have a traditional Jewish wedding marrying a rich girl. Therefore, my parents didn't even have a small wedding party. After they got married they began to live at my mother's home. Two or three months later my father got a job assignment in Zhmerinka, near Litin, in Vinnitsa region. My father got a room in a communal apartment [10](#) in a small one-storied building where I was born on 31 August 1933.

## Growing up

I have dim memories about our life in Zhmerinka. It was a small town with a railway station. About half of its population was Jewish. There was a synagogue, like in all Jewish towns. Since my father joined the Communist Party in 1930, my parents stopped observing any Jewish holidays. We visited grandmother Hana and grandfather Ghedali at Pesach and Rosh Hashanah in Litin. Grandmother Riva also tempered justice with mercy in due time, particularly that Shmilyk got married shortly after my parents. Whenever we visited grandmother Riva and grandfather Ghedali I had an inner feeling that they didn't treat my brother or me with the same care as they did Shmilyk's children: they didn't give us presents or show any affection.

In 1937 my mother gave birth to a boy. He was named Moro. My father didn't dare to complete a brit milah for him since Soviet authorities struggled against religion [11](#) and this information came up my father might lose his job and be expelled from the Party. Therefore, my brother was not circumcised. During the war this saved his life. Shortly after Moro was born grandfather Ghedali died in 1937 and my mother moved grandmother Hana to live with us in Zhmerinka. My grandmother did the housework, looked after my brother and played with me. My mother went back to work at school. My father worked long hours, but when he came home from work he always tried to find some time to play with us. We didn't go to kindergarten. My father loved my mother dearly, but he didn't have an opportunity to spend much time with her. I remember that he bought her a stay in a recreation center for a month. We missed her a lot. Our father worked for a road construction company. He went to work even if he felt ill.

In 1940 our father got a new job assignment and we moved to Vladimir-Volynskiy in 370 km from Zhmerinka. Pinkhus and his family moved there shortly afterward. This town belonged to Poland [Annexation of Western Ukraine] [12](#) before 1 November 1939. When we moved there it was located in 8 km from a new border of Russia and Poland. There were many Jewish refugees who escaped from Hitler who occupied Poland. [Editor's note: in September 1939 the Jewish population raised from 9 to 25 thousand people due to refugees.] Vladimir-Volynskiy was a lovely clean town. There was a big beautiful synagogue and nice stone houses with stores and shops in the town. There was a Catholic cathedral in the center. My father received a two-room apartment in a 2-storied house

behind this cathedral in early 1941. We moved there from one room that we had from the school where my mother worked. It took us few months to repair the new apartment. We moved into it in the middle of June 1941. After our father moved our belongings to this new apartment, he went on a business trip. On 22 June 1941, when the Great Patriotic War began, our father was not at home. A day later fascists came to our yard. Our mother and we rushed to the basement. Our grandmother was confined to bed and stayed inside. Her bed was beside a window and when we got out we saw that the window was broken and she was covered with pieces of glass. Our mother hastily put away our father's clothing and documents. He wore uniformed clothes that was in fashion with governmental and Party officials and my mother didn't want fascists to find them. We knew from refugees that fascists were killing communists and Jews in the first turn. Of course, it was hard to believe that the situation was that bad. We didn't believe at all that somebody would dare to attack us. It just happened and it was scaring. Pinkhus came to our house and mother began to excavate a hiding pit in the basement for him since Pinkhus was a communist.

### During the War

The first days of occupation with army units in the town were relatively quiet until SS Sondereinsatzkommando units came to town. They started operations against Jewish people. On 5 July they shot 500 men in the yard of the town prison. [Editor's note: Dora mistakenly indicates the number of 500. Actually, about 150 men were shot on that day.] The rest of Jewish men were in hiding in homes and in the woods. When grandmother Hana died in early September 1941 there were no Jewish men in the town to take to bury her at the cemetery. My mother didn't allow Pinkhus to leave the house and she had to carry grandmother to the cemetery with three old women who were our neighbors. It wasn't too heavy load for them since my grandmother was as thin as a mummy when she died. Until her last day, when she was conscious, she prayed in Hebrew and asked mother to light candles near her at Sabbath. My mother was concerned that somebody might hear Jewish prayers, but she couldn't oppose a dying person. My mother dug a pit and lowered my grandmother in there wrapped in my grandfather's tallit. I don't know whether there was a Kaddish recited over her grave. I don't think my mother found it possible considering the situation.

We didn't have any information about my father or his parents and relatives in Litin. After their initial operations, fascists made several raids shooting innocent at people. Our mother didn't allow us to leave the house. In early 1942 the remaining Jews – women, children and old people – were taken to the ghetto in the former storage facilities at the market in the center of the town. The area was bared, but the gate was kept open for some time. We slept on the floor under a bast mat that we found there since we didn't have a chance to take things from home. When the ghetto was opened, Pinkhus stayed in his hiding pit and at night our mother took him to a Ukrainian family: my mother was concerned about him. Many young men were either shot or died doing hard work. Their son was in her class before the war and mother knew them well – unfortunately, I don't know their names. Pinkhus stayed with them until the end of the war. I don't know why we didn't go to this family. Perhaps, our mother thought that fascists only exterminated Jewish men and wanted to rescue Pinkhus.

I have dim memories about our life in the ghetto. Our mother had a yellow star on her clothes, but I can't remember whether we, children had to wear it as well. I remember the never-ending feeling of hunger and fear. Our mother went to work. She washed dishes in a diner for officers. She

brought us leftovers that seemed a luxury to us. Sometimes our mother took us to the café when the gate was still open. Once a man wearing a policeman uniform approached us. He knew our mother. She was much loved and respected in the town. People in Western Ukraine traditionally respected teachers. He told my mother that when they closed the gate of the ghetto, our mother and we would perish. He suggested that if she agreed he would take us, children, to a village to help us to survive. Our mother said 'I shall be with my children to the end. Get me a Ukrainian passport and help us to get out of here, if you can'. A day later this policeman took us out on a horse-ridden cart. All I remember is that his name was Sergei. It's hard to imagine how hard it must have been for him to get forged documents for us. He gave our mother a passport for Vera Grigorievna. This was how my mother's pupils who found it hard to pronounce her Jewish name called her. I've forgotten what last name there was in this passport. Sergei took two other Jewish families from the ghetto with us. He showed the guard my mother's forged documents and documents for other inmates of the ghetto in his wagon and he let us out. On our way we dropped by our house to pick up some warm clothes and some other belongings valuable for our mother. Sergei took us to a remote Ukrainian village and disappeared for good. He was afraid that someone might report on him. At that time someone helping Jews was subject to death penalty while he rescued few Jewish families.

This was a beginning of our adventures. I don't remember in what farms or villages we stayed. Our mother took to any work she could lay her hands on: she learned to mow, thresh, weed the fields, milk cows and look after cattle when she had never done any farm work before. Whatever valuables she had taken from home – some silver tableware and a golden ring – she gave to the first farmer that gave us shelter. We pretended to be Ukrainians when we stayed with Ukrainian families and Polish staying with Polish families. My mother was called Vera and I was called Galina in Ukrainian villages and Halina in Polish villages. My brother was called Tadeuzs, Tadik. He is still called in the family by this name. We never stayed long in one village. Our mother saw grandfather Ghedali or grandmother Hana in her dream telling her it was time to leave a village. Here is what they were saying 'Get up, take the children and move on, there is going to be a calamity here'. In the morning we got dressed and went away. Several times after we left there were raids in those villages. I remember that we were hiding in a basement during a raid once. There were many rats in the basement and mother stayed awake a whole night protecting us from disgusting rats since they even could chew on children's faces.

In one village its senior man suspected that we were Jews. My brother did not quite understand what was going on and began to speak Yiddish quite out of place. This senior man said to mother 'You are Ukrainian, but your children are zhydy'. He grabbed Tadik dragging him into the yard to give him to policemen. It helped that he had not been circumcised. Mother pulled down his pants crying and begging the senior man to have mercy. When he saw my brother he left us alone. I don't know whether he quite believed what we told him since we left that village at night. Once we got into a raid against Jews. We were hiding in a house. Fascists shot a girl of about 10 years of age by the window of the house. I will never forget her crying and begging. How the girl begged for fascists to let her live and how she wished to stay alive!

Besides constant fear that our Jewish identity might be revealed we also had to maneuver between Ukrainian and Polish people. During the Great Patriotic War there was deadly confrontation between Ukrainian and Polish residents in Western regions of Ukraine. Ukrainians were taking

vengeance on their enemy for the past centuries of oppression [Ukrainian-Polish confrontation]<sup>13</sup>. Farm went against farm and village against village with axes, other weapons or just whips. Before our eyes Ukrainians slaughtered a Polish farm tenants. When they left there was nobody to bury the dead. Our mother dug a pit and dragged the dead there. I was helping mother and I believe our 5-year-old Tadik to have matured at that moment. At least he stopped being naughty using Jewish words. Neither he nor I could understand why people killed people, but we had seen death. My mother met one participant of this blood shedding massacre: he was a school director in Vladimir-Volynski. My mother was afraid that he might recognize her. Some time later he was arrested – I don't know why, and taken out of the town. We don't know what happened to him, but mother breathed with relief after he was gone.

Once a Polish group came to the Ukrainian village where we were staying. They took us into the yard. They told mother to step aside and my brother and I were taken to stand by the wall of a shed. They intended to shoot us. Mother began to scream in Russian, probably shock stricken as she was. She begged them in Russian to let her children go. Commander of the gang asked her who she was. She could do nothing, but tell them the truth. He ordered his men to take away their guns and they left.

We didn't come to Vladimir-Volynskiy knowing from farmers that Germans continued to exterminate Jews there. One day in early 1944 my mother sent me to the market in town to exchange a piece of fabric for a piece of clothing for me. I went there with another woman. The ghetto was closed: all its inmates had been exterminated by then. [The ghetto in Vladimir-Volynskiy was liquidated on 13 December 1943.] However, there were frequent raids to identify Jews hiding in houses. This woman and I got entrapped in one of these raids. Fortunately, we managed to escape and to hiding in a house. When we returned to the village my mother burst into crying from sorrow and the joy of seeing me. She heard about the raid in town and she thought we had perished. She never let me leave her again.

Our wandering lasted for about three years. Every now and then our rescuer Sergei visited us. I don't know how he found us in various villages. Probably local villagers mentioned to him when they saw us. He brought us gifts and had long discussions with our mother. I don't know what was between them or whether there was something else besides friendship and support. In spring 1944 I understood that mother was pregnant. It's hard for me to talk about it. It didn't occur to me then, that it took two people to conceive a baby, and I didn't think how my mother got a baby. My mother never revealed this secret. I didn't ask her and she didn't tell me anything even when she was dying. I don't know who was the father of her child. Mother took her secret with her. I don't know whether there were feelings between her and our rescuer or whether it was submission to crude forces hoping to rescue us on her part.

In spring 1944 Hitler armies were retreating. Villagers were ordered to march ahead of German units to make a live shield to protect retreating fascists in case Soviet units attacked them from the rear. We were also in this column. We were hungry and thirsty. It was hard for my mother to walk. There were air raids few times and we hid in ditches along the road. We came as far as the outskirts of Lublin in Poland. There was another air raid and we fell into a ditch and mother covered us with her body to protect from bombs. When we rose to our feet we saw that we had been in a sewage gutter. We were dirty with stinking faces. Mother asked our guard permission to go wash ourselves in the river. We washed our clothes and ourselves. We were there two days. Fascists

moved on and we went back to the east where our home was. We only met Soviet units on the way. Mother couldn't help crying telling them our story. Soldiers felt sorry for us giving us a piece of bread or a piece of sugar. Few times we had meals in their field kitchen facilities. We felt so happy to be going back home! Vladimir-Volynskiy was liberated on 22 July 1944. We returned home in early August.

## After the War

There were other tenants in our house and we found an abandoned apartment. We stayed to live there since its owners never came back. During the war 22,000 Jews from Vladimir-Volynskiy and surrounding areas were exterminated. There were only five Jewish families living in the town after the war, including us. We survived by miracle.

In September 1944 our mother went to work as a primary school teacher and my brother and I went to the first form at school. He was seven and I was ten years old. I had to do many chores besides studying. In December 1944 our mother gave birth to a boy. She named him Grigori after our grandfather. She went back to work and I looked after the baby washing and feeding him. I loved him dearly.

Shortly after the victory in July 1945 our father returned home. He kissed us and went to talk with mother in the kitchen. He didn't say anything about the baby. He and mother talked through the night. In the morning father had reddish eyes from sleepless night. He kissed us 'good-bye' and left. Our mother cried a lot. She told us that our father had another family. Our father told her what had happened to him through those years. He was in Zhmerinka when the war began. He went to look for us, but then there were Germans everywhere. Our father knew that Vladimir-Volynskiy was occupied and believed that we were already dead. He even mentioned that he thought he saw our mother's coat on a woman in Lutsk and this was a final proof for him that we were dead. He returned to Zhmerinka, got a truck and drove his parents and aunt Fania and her children to the railway station where they got on a train heading to the east. He also went with them. In the train he met a Jewish woman. Her name was Fira. He was suffering and he found consolation and sympathy with her. They parted on the next day. Our father took his relatives to Bugulma, in Tatarstan. I don't know for what reason they decided to stay there. Father was recruited to the army. He served in a road construction unit installing bridges for the front line units. Our father corresponded with this unit and knew that she gave birth to a girl in 1942. The girl was named Ella. Our father asked our mother to forgive him and tried to explain that what happened to him was a result of the pain he suffered from thinking that we were dead. I don't know whether he asked mother about Grisha. He decided that he and mother had to forget what had happened to them and live together again, but our mother was a proud woman. She never forgave our father. She said she had suffered too much during occupation and couldn't forgive his faithlessness. She didn't mention that she was unfaithful, though. She was probably concerned that our father could be unfair to her illegal baby. Our father went to Kiev where Fira and her daughter lived. He lived with his second family, but he didn't lose hope to return our mother.

Our father's sister Bella returned from evacuation and visited us several times. Grandmother Riva also returned from evacuation and kept asking mother to come live with her in Zhmerinka. Grandfather Yankel died in evacuation in Bugulma in 1942. Our grandmother begged our mother to forgive our father and let him come to live with us, but our mother never changed her mind about

it. Our father came again in 1947, but our mother refused him again. We have a photo of our father wearing a Soviet military uniform and aunt Bella in Zhmerinka photographed after our mother's final refusal in June 1947. Our father signed the photo 'This is the most terrible day in my life'. I saw grandmother Riva once or twice after the war. She lived in Zhmerinka and died in the early 1960s.

Our life was very hard after the war. There was famine in 1946-47. Our father didn't support us. He was either offended by mother's refusal or our mother probably refused from his help. Our mother's salary was hardly enough for us to live half a month. It was especially hard in summer when mother received her 3-month salary, but this money melted away promptly. We received bread per bread coupons. We also got a glass of milk at school, but not in summer when we were on vacation. Our mother bought flour and made pies and buns. She sent me to sell them at the market. She was probably concerned that she would be recognized and arrested for her activities since private entrepreneurship was forbidden. She traveled to Moscow to see her distant relatives several times. She bought women's underwear, stockings and fabric and I went to sell them in our town. We also grew potatoes and other vegetables in our small kitchen garden. Basically, we were trying hard to survive.

My brother and I were the only Jewish children at school. Our teachers and schoolmates treated us well. When the state anti-Semitic campaign known as struggle against cosmopolitanism [14](#) began in 1948 our mother was very worried. She read newspapers and didn't sleep at night. She probably understood the absurdity of what was going on, but she never discussed this subject with us. This campaign had no impact on our town where there were about two dozens of Jews left.

My brother and I finished school in 1951. A year later we entered the Agronomical Faculty of the Agricultural College in Verkhovka village, Obodov district Vinnitsa region. We were the only Jewish students in this College. We lived in a hostel. My brother didn't finish his studies. We received a stipend, but it was not enough for him. He kept asking me to give him money. He was constantly hungry. Before finishing his studies he quit and went to our father in Kiev. Our father was doing well and Tadik lived with him and worked additionally. Later he returned home, but again went back to our father. For few years he traveled between home and Kiev.

I remember Stalin's death in 1953. We, students, were crying. We didn't know how to live without him. We stood a guard of honor by his portrait in our College with tears in our eyes. My co-students were Ukrainian girls from surrounding villages. They had a good attitude toward me, but I never mentioned to anybody that I was in occupation. At that time there was official hostile attitude towards survivors in occupation during the war.

I began to meet with a Ukrainian guy in College. His name was Victor Puchalski. He was born in Aleksandrovka village, Vinnitsa region in 1932. He was the only child in his family and his parents spoiled him a lot. During the Great Patriotic War Victor stayed in his village. He saw fascist atrocities against Jews and he came to respecting Jewish people. I told him that I was a Jew and that we were in occupation during the war. Victor and I fell in love and actually became a husband and wife during our last year in College. His parents were also positive about our relationships. Victor's two uncles were married to Jewish women, so there were Jews in their family already.

After finishing our College we came to my mother in Vladimir-Volynskiy. My mother didn't care about his nationality. She saw that we were in love and this was what mattered to her. I was

pregnant. We went to submit our documents to the registry office, but they refused to accept them. They explained that Victor did not have a residential permit [15](#) to live in the town. In the residential agency they refused to issue this permit to him since he was in no relation to me. My mother wasn't a member of the Party, but she went to the district Party committee anyway to obtain their approval of our marriage. She managed to handle this issue for us. Victor and I got married. We didn't have a wedding party. My mother just made a small dinner for our family and Victor's father Andrei Puchalski who came to our wedding.

In 1957 our son Anatoli was born. I stayed at home and my husband was an agronomist in a kolkhoz near the town. Victor was an honest man and didn't allow anybody to steal in the kolkhoz. The management of the kolkhoz was not quite happy about this situation. Once Victor bought a sack of potatoes from the kolkhoz, but they delivered a cart full of bags of potatoes trying to bribe my husband. He told them to take it back. Since then his bosses kept picking on him and fired for some minor drawback. Victor couldn't find another job for a year. He turned to higher authorities and regional party committee, but couldn't find justice with them. Then he wrote a letter to Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper [one of the most popular daily newspapers in the USSR]. He resumed his work after the newspaper interference. This time Victor was sent to work in a distant kolkhoz. I followed him there and my mother looked after Anatoli. I went to work as director of a store in this kolkhoz. I had a diploma of agronomist, but there was no employment for me. We didn't stay long there since Victor lost his job again. We returned to Vladimir-Volynski and lived on my mother's salary for almost a year. Victor's parents and my father also supported us.

Some time later my father became director of construction material plant in Transcarpathian region with center in Ternopol town. His wife and daughter didn't want to follow him to this provincial area and he offered us to come with him. My mother insisted that we accepted his offer. In 1959 Victor moved to Ternopol and got a job at the plant. Then he and my father returned to pick up my son and me and we left there. We lived in a one-room apartment that my father received for few years until Victor went to work at another plant and we received a 3-room apartment where we live now.

In 1961 our daughter Anna, named after my grandmother Hana, was born and in 1964 our daughter Evgenia was born. We were poor. I obtained a license for manufacture of flowers and wedding bouquets and made and sold my goods. I worked a lot at home sewing and knitting. My husband had stomach ulcer and went to resorts on vacation, but I couldn't afford a vacation. My father's family moved to Ternopol, but we didn't keep in touch. They were very jealous about our father and I had nothing in common with my half-sister Ella. They were particularly jealous about my father and mother keeping in touch – by that time my father's wife and daughter had moved to Ternopol. My mother never remarried. I think she always loved my father and hoped that they would be together one day, but my father never asked her again.

My brother Moro (we called him affectionately Tadik in the family) finished a Prosthodontic School and worked in Kiev. He was married three times. His wives were Jewish. With his latest wife Fira he moved to America in the late 1970s. They have a good life in New York. His son from his first marriage Fyodor and his daughter from the second marriage Izabella also live in the USA.

My second brother Grisha finished a school for electricians and worked in Vladimir-Volynski. In 1971 Grisha died in a car accident. My mother came to Ternopol: she came to live with me in 1967 when she retired. We buried Grisha in Ternopol. My mother was in deep sorrow and hardly ever left

the house. My father died in Ternopol in 1978, We buried him at the town cemetery. His second wife and daughter live in the USA where they left in late 1980s.

Trouble has never left our family. My younger daughter Evgenia married a Ukrainian man after finishing school. His name was Grigori Kudiakov. Grigori went to serve in the army and my daughter gave birth to a boy. She named him Grigori after my brother who had perished. When the child was one year old Evgenia and her husband's sister went to visit Grigori, her husband, in the north of Russia where he was on service. They stayed in a house. Grigori came to stay with them on a short leave. They stoked a stove in the house. They had a substantial dinner and they probably had a drink or few. They didn't open a choke in the stove and were poisoned with charcoal gas. Grigori survived and Evgenia and his sister died. I didn't think I could survive my younger daughter. One thing that helped me was caring about little Grigori. His father Grigori Kudiakov returned from the army and kept insisting that we gave his son back to him. He and his parents kept coming to our home abusing me and calling us 'zhydy' [kike]. They said they didn't want the child to be raised in 'zhydowski' manner. I don't know what they meant, but nothing good, I am sure. I decided against giving them the child of my beloved daughter. Grigori turned to court and the court decided to take my grandson from me. Then I packed and left with little Grisha. We traveled from one relative to another in Khmelnytskyi, Zhmerinka and Vinnitsa. We returned after Grigori promised my husband to leave my grandson to me and begged me to return to be able to see his son occasionally. We returned to Ternopol in 1985. My mother who had endured the death of my father, her son and granddaughter and was missing us, in addition lived only two months after we returned. She died in 1985. We buried her near the father's grave.

However, trouble didn't leave us then. My older son Anatoli entered a military school in Kamenets-Podolsk. After finishing it, he served in Georgia and then in Czechoslovakia. By that time he was married to a Ukrainian girl Maria. Then my son served in Latvia. His wife and their two daughters – Inna, born in 1976 and Anna, born in 1985 – were with him. In 1984 my son felt ill and came to me. He had to stay in bed. Doctors diagnosed that he had disseminated sclerosis. My son was ill for 17 years and for 15 of them he was confined to bed. His wife Maria and their children lived in the apartment that my son received in Ternopol. She also received his military pension, but she only rarely visited her husband. I was trying to do all I could to help my son live longer. My husband went back to live in his home village in 1992 there he grew vegetables in his kitchen garden. We separated since we decided that he could support us better living in the village and growing vegetables and fruit. Besides, my husband felt more comfortable living in a village. We lived separately ever since. My husband died in 2000. I stayed with my son cooking for him and giving food. I invited best doctors to consult him, but even now medicine is helpless against this terrible disease. We both enjoyed the time when I embroidered pictures sitting by his bedside. He liked the colors that replaced the colors of life for him. My son died in July 2003. He fell asleep and never woke up. Before he died he asked his wife to come to see him. She held his hands whispering something in his ear. She was probably saying her farewells and asked his forgiveness. I buried my son in accordance with Jewish traditions near my parents. Members of the Jewish community recited a prayer. Although Anatoli and my daughters were registered as Ukrainians, in his last years Anatoli read about Jews and Jewish life and felt closer to Jews. Anatoli's daughters were raised as Ukrainian girls. Inna, the older daughter, finished a Pedagogical College in Ternopol. She is married and has two daughters: Svetlana and Ekaterina Soloviovs. Alla, the younger daughter, lives with her mother. They haven't visited me after my son died.

My daughter Anna lives in Khmel'nitsk. She has a Jewish husband whose surname is Viller. After finishing the College of Economics in Ternopol, Anna went to work as an accountant. She works as an accountant for a private company now. She has a nice family. They observe Jewish traditions and they've raised their children Jewish. Their older son Evgeni, named after my daughter who perished, was born in 1986. He has finished school this year and is going to continue his studies in Israel under a students' exchange program. Vitali, a younger son, born in 1889, goes to the 8th form at school.

Now I come to six graves of my close ones at the cemetery: my brother Grigori, my father and mother, my daughter Evgenia, my husband and my son Anatoli. The joy of my life is my grandson Grigori, Evgenia's son. I've raised him Jewish, telling him about the Jewish history, traditions and culture and took him to a Jewish Sunday school. His father kept his promise: he often came to see his son and supported him, but never again tried to take him from me. My son-in-law hasn't remarried. He comes to see me. Few years ago, in 1997 my grandson went to Israel under a students' exchange program and decided to remain there. He serves in Israeli army now. Grigori observes Jewish traditions. He is religious, but he isn't an orthodox Jew. He put a mezuzah on our front door. He calls me before each holiday, greets me and reminds me of what I have to do on each holiday. The other day he reminded me about fasting at Yom Kippur and I fasted.

I've never been well-off in my life, but when perestroika [16](#) began in the late 1980s it made life unbearable. Therefore, I have negative feelings about perestroika. At the same time I am happy about a rebirth of the Jewish life. I am a member of the Jewish community in Ternopol. There is a Hesed affiliate that provides assistance to old Jews. They deliver food packages and send a nurse to help me. Besides, I receive a German pension as victim of Holocaust and I can manage all right. We always observed Jewish holidays in the family, particularly when my mother lived with us. We bought matzah in underground bakeries before Pesach and observed Rosh Hashanah. I must say that my husband showed understanding to our needs. Now I observe Sabbath, light candles and pray over them on Friday evenings. I do not attend community events since I will be in the mourning for Anatoli for a year. I used to go to the community on Jewish holidays. I enjoyed the celebrations. I cannot attend them now. There is a lot of joy and entertainment at these celebrations while I feel like thinking about my son and praying for him. Then I would like to visit Grisha in Israel. Perhaps, I shall go there for good.

## GLOSSARY:

### [1](#) Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population (apart from certain privileged families) was only allowed to live in these areas.

### [2](#) 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 WWI, 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.

### **3 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.

### **4 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of 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.

### **5 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

### **6 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 October Revolution and the 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.

### **7 Nationalization**

confiscation of private businesses or property after the revolution of 1917 in Russia.

### **8 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.

### **9 Kulaks**

The majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

## **10 Shared apartments**

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 shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **11 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

## **12 Annexation of Western Ukraine**

on November 1 1939 the USSR officially approves annexation of Western Ukraine to Soviet Ukraine under the German-Soviet Molotov and Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact. The USSR also invaded Poland from the east and most Ukrainian populated territory to the Ukrainian SSR.

## **13 Ukrainian-Polish confrontation**

1387 - XVIII century Poland rules Halychyna; 1569 - Lyublińska Unia (Lublin Union) - All Ukrainian territory under Lithuanian rule (except Polissia and Beresteyskchyna) transfers to Poland; 1630 Ukrainian Kozak uprising against Poland; 1648 - Beginning of liberation of Ukraine from Polish rule headed by kozak het'man Bohdan Khmelnytsky; 1793 - Transfer of lands on the Right Bank to Russia from Poland excluding Halychyna, Bukovyna, Volyn and a part of Polissya, already annexed by Austria. Western Ukraine fell under the rule of Polish rules throughout its history and Ukrainian people historically struggled for independence from invaders.

## **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 Residence permit**

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

## **16 Perestroika**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s. Perestroika [restructuring] was the term attached to the attempts (1985–91) by Mikhail [Gorbachev](#) to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralised market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratise the Communist party organisation. By 1991, perestroika was on the wane, and after the failed [August Coup](#) of 1991 was eclipsed by the dramatic changes in the constitution of the union.