

Anatoliy Shor

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Bershad

Ukraine

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I visited Anatoliy Shor with a member of the Bershad Jewish community. Anatoliy lives in a two-bedroom apartment in a 2-storied apartment house. He told us that this house was built to replace the cottage that belonged to his wife's family. Anatoliy's apartment is stuffed with old books covered with a layer of dust. There are signs of neglect everywhere. Anatoliy seems to feel quite comfortable finding his way through this mess. He is a very nervous person. He was shell shocked during the war, and this affected his health condition: he gets confused about the dates, events, names of people, and at times has problems with finding the right word. He jumps up and runs around the room showing some certificates, documents, and I need to wait patiently until he composes himself.

[My family background](#)

[My early life](#)

[The famine](#)

[Before the war](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family background

My paternal and maternal ancestors came from Bershad town [about 270 km south-west of Kiev] in Vinnitsa province. Bershad was a Jewish town: the majority of its population in the late 19th – early 20th century was Jewish. Jews resided in the central part having their houses closely adjusting to one another, with small backyards with hardly any space, but for a little vegetable garden and a shed. Jews in Bershad dealt in crafts: they were tailors, shoemakers, potters, glass cutters, small store owners and vendors. Ukrainians and Russians lived in the suburb, on the other side of the Dohna River meandering around the town. Jews bought their food products from Ukrainian farmers, and the Ukrainians went to get their clothes, shoes and haberdashery from Jews. They were good neighbors and respected each other's traditions and religion. Jews spoke Yiddish and were also fluent in Ukrainian, as well as Ukrainians understood Yiddish very well. Ukrainian farmers brought their products to the market square in the central street: there were wagons loaded with vegetables, poultry and fish at the market on market days. Vendors and their customers bargained in Yiddish, Ukrainian and Russian all at the same time. I liked the market. My mother took me shopping. There was a pretty Christian church in the town attracting Jewish children with its golden domes and the bells tolling. However, the kids were taught that Jews were not allowed to go inside, so we all kept our distance from the church admiring the sight of it.

Regretfully, my grandmothers and grandfathers died before I was born. My parents told me a little about them, but my memory failed to keep this information, which is the result of the wounds and the contusion that I had during the Great Patriotic War [1](#). My paternal grandfather's name was Shmil Shor, but I can't remember my grandmother's name. They were born in Bershad in the middle 19th century. I don't know what exactly Shmil was engaged in, but he was a small craftsman and worked from morning till night to provide for his family. He was very religious and went to the small synagogue near his house every day.

There were 13 or 14 synagogues in Bershad, there was a cheder, a shochet and a Jewish hospital.

All synagogues, but one poor little synagogue, were closed in the middle 1930s, the buildings were destroyed during and after the Great Patriotic War: people disassembled them for wood and construction materials. My grandfather also prayed at home and observed all Jewish traditions: he followed kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and followed all other rules. My father's older brothers actually told my father about their family. There were two or three of them, but I can't remember the names. I know that one of them moved to America at the beginning of WWI, and the rest died before the Great Patriotic War. They were much older than my father. My father Pinkhus Shor was the last baby in Shmil's family, when my grandmother expected no more children. He was born in 1890. Like his older brothers my father was raised religious and studied in the cheder. My grandfather and grandmother died from an epidemic of typhus almost at the same time in the early 1900s. My father went to study the sheepskin jacket maker's toil at the age of 8-10. His older brothers supported him, but he had to start work at an early age anyway. When WWI began, my father was recruited to the czarist army almost at once. About a year later he was severely wounded and taken to hospital. When he was released from the hospital he returned home. I don't know how my father met my mother – they actually may have known each other, or my grandfather knew my mother's family, or they may have met through a shadkhan. Anyway, my parents got married in 1918.

I know about my mother's parents even less. All I know is my grandfather's name was Naftul since I was named after him, but I don't remember his last name, or my grandmother's name. My maternal grandparents were 5 years younger than my paternal grandparents. I don't know what exactly my grandfather did for the living. My mother only told me that he was a poor craftsman.

My grandmother had several children, but only my mother's older sister, whose name I can't remember, and my mother Reizl, born in 1893, survived. My mother was the last child, born in the family. She studied 2 or 3 years in a Jewish school, and this was all education she got. According to a common vision at the time, this education was more than sufficient for a girl from a poor Jewish family. Reizl could read and write in Yiddish and knew prayers that her father Naftul taught her. My grandfather and grandmother were very religious and raised my mother religious, too. My parents' wedding, despite the troubled times, attacks of gangs [2](#), revolution [3](#), hunger and devastation, was arranged according to all Jewish rules. Before the war we had my parents' wedding picture on the wall: my mother wearing a white gown and a veil and my father wearing a black suit. They were photographed the moment they stepped into the chuppah at the most beautiful synagogue in Bershad. My parents were hopeful about the revolution believing the communist propaganda with all their heart. They did not take part in the communist movement, but they were enthusiastic about everything new it brought in.

My parents lived in my mother parents' home. My mother was a housewife. My father made warm sheepskin coats that were in demand with Jews and Ukrainians in Bershad and the neighboring villages. My father worked very hard. He often worked till late at night by the light of a kerosene lamp putting coats together and embroidering in red woolen yarn on them. Coat makers of Bershad had an unwritten rule that they followed: they divided the neighboring villages to do their trade in the areas that were assigned to them. My father often traveled to his villages where he had customers. He stayed in his shop, which was arranged in our house from morning till late at night, but there was nothing that could force him to work on Sabbath, the sacred tradition that he never breached. In 1919 my older brother named Shmil after my father's father was born. This was a hard time. Mama told me that when gangs broke into the village, the whole family found shelter in the basement and she pressed her palm to little Shmil's mouth to keep him quiet. If he had cried out, the bandits might have discovered the family. The town seemed to be overburdened with all kinds of trouble in those years: hunger and robbers had a hard impact on my grandmother and grandfather who fell ill and died. I don't know the exact time of their death, but it happened before I was born.

My early life

I was born on 7 January 1922. I was given the name of Naftul after my mother's father at the synagogue. According to the rules I had a brit milah on the 8th day after I was born. In 1926 my sister Haya was born, and in 1928 – my younger brother Gersh was born. I have dim memories about my childhood. There were three rooms and a kitchen with a Russian stove in it in our house, located in the Naberezhnaya Street, the embankment of the Dohna River. Our town was located in the southern part of Ukraine, and the summers were long and warm, so I spent most of my time playing with friends outside. There were runoff ditches along the pavement in the streets and little bridges over them to give access to houses. When they were filled with water after a rain, we liked making paper or wooden boats letting them sail in the ditches. When we grew older we ran to the river bank where we bathed and lay in the sun on the sand beach. There were only Jewish children around since we lived in the Jewish part of the town. We spoke Yiddish at home and to one another. I only heard Ukrainian, when I went to the market with my mother and she bargained with vendors in Ukrainian. By the way, Ukrainians could also speak Yiddish, so both sides enjoyed the bargaining to their heart's content. The Ukrainian vendors showed my mother a great deal of respect and always made discounts for her. Mama was also very polite with them: she asked them how things were, how they felt and wished them health and luck. For me, a small Jewish boy that I was at the time, going shopping at the market with my mother was a kind of lessons of friendship and peace, and I was learning to respect people of different nationalities. Since early childhood I was interested in every living thing in the surrounding: I wanted to know the structure of wings of butterflies and dragonflies, I used to watch an ant moving, dissect a fish or a frog to see what there was inside. My interest to the inside of living beings was so strong that I used to dissect insects to find out what they were like and how they worked all together. I remember, when I was a child, the girl, whom I liked, caught me at this very interesting process, when I was tearing off dragonfly's wings watching it. The girl ran away scared, ran to my mother to complain about me. Mama told me off, but this didn't make my interest to the living beings fade: perhaps, these were the first demonstrations of my desire to deal in medicine. Though the girl never approached me again and so, this was how my first love crashed.

However, our family was a traditional Jewish family, and according to the rules, when I turned 4, my father took me to the melamed in cheder. The teacher had 8 boys in his group and we took turns having classes at the pupils' homes. When it was turn to have a class in our home, my mother made delicious little pies for the whole bunch of us. 80 years have passed, but I still gratefully remember our teacher and can still remember the Jewish literacy he taught us. Since my childhood I saw my father putting on his tallit and tefillin to pray. When I grew a little older I accompanied him to the synagogue, and on Saturday I carried his prayer book following him. We looked forward to Sabbath. Before Sabbath mama cleaned and washed the house and covered the tables with clean flax tablecloths. On weekdays she cooked borsch, beans and noodles, but on Friday morning she started cooking for Sabbath and there was delicious smell of the Saturday food teasing us – sweet and sour stew in the pot in the oven, gefilte fish with vegetables cooking in another pot, mama took crispy challot from the oven. We washed ourselves and dressed up waiting for our father to come home from the synagogue to start celebrating Sabbath. Mama wore a white kerchief. She lit candles and covering her eyes with her hands read the prayer, my father pronounced the blessing and we dipped a challah into the salt. We were even allowed to sip few drops of red sweet wine. Mama left the ceramic pots with food for Saturday in the oven that she sealed and closed with a lid. The food kept warm in the oven. Mama opened the oven by herself, though it was against the rules – she had to invite a Christian person to do this kind of work, but my hardworking mama could not imagine that somebody else's hands would touch the food that she had cooked with so much love. She used to say that the Lord would forgive her for this fault. We also followed kashrut. We had special utensils for meat and dairy products, boards and tableware and mama taught us to eat correctly according to the kosher rules. And how we looked forward to Pesach! Mama cooed everything so delicious for this holiday: kigelekh, kneyd lakh with chicken broth, rich boiled chicken, and pies. There were such preparations to this holiday! The walls were whitewashed with the mixture of clay, lime and whiting, all corners were scrubbed. The house was shining clean. Long before the holiday we went to the market where mama chose a chicken for the seder on Pesach. I liked watching her lifting the hens – white, black and speckled, blew under their tail base to find out whether they were fat enough, and would be good to make nourishing chicken soup. There was fish splashing in huge tubs: mama looked at their gills – how bright red they were, and also the fish eyes – whether they lost the luster. Of course, she did – we wanted the very fresh fish on our table. Also, mama bought new clothes for us, kids, here, at the market: trousers, coats or shoes. I can't remember mama buying anything for herself: she always wore her old dress, always clean, and a kerchief. She found it important to buy something new for the children, and I believe, she enjoyed it greatly to give presents to her dear ones. My father conducted the seder reclining at the head of the table. Shmuel posed the four questions to him and when he grew older it became my duty. I was looking for the afikoman, for which I could get any gift from my father.

I also liked other holidays, particularly Chanukkah, but not just because kids were given presents. Everything seemed to be brighter and merrier on this holiday. Mama's doughnuts with jam were the most delicious, and so were potato pancakes fried to crust. I remember my father telling me about the Chanukkah and why there were dishes with plant oil on the table on this holiday. I liked autumn holidays with Simchat Torah crowning them, when the Torah scroll was taken out of the synagogue, and all Jews were dancing and singing following the rabbi. We also celebrated Shavuot and Sukkot. My father made a tent from planks and branches in the yard and we had meals there and spent most of the time in this tent. We also had guests. Rosh Hashanah was as grand as Pesach. My parents fasted on Yom Kippur, and when I grew older I also joined them.

In 1929, when I turned 7, I went to the 7-year Jewish school where Shmil studied. I took a great deal of interest in the living surrounding. I could spend hours watching dragonfly or beetle's wings, or disembowel a frog to see what was there inside. I liked natural sciences and decided that I would become a doctor or a biologist. I began to attend a group of nature studies and the town library where I read almost all books about nature, medicine and animate nature. However, my interests were not limited to nature. I also had other interests. I became a pioneer [4](#) and was very proud to wear a pioneer neck tie. I remember the ceremony in the newly built club. Mama made a festive dinner. On that day I went to bed wearing my new red neck tie – I didn't want to part with it even in my sleep. I was a rather active pioneer. I had a good memory and I was the fastest of all with learning poems and songs. I took part in amateur performances and concerts on Soviet holidays. There were many Soviet songs in Yiddish and I enjoyed singing them on the school stage. For the active pioneer work I was awarded a trip to a pioneer camp in Vinnitsa region. All pioneers from Bershad went there in a bus singing pioneer songs. I particularly liked the morning and evening linings. Before leaving the camp we arranged a concert and a pioneer fire. Well, this was the only time I went to the camp. In summer we usually spent one or two months in the village where my father was working. We stayed in a Ukrainian hut and I ran to the river bank with village boys. Nobody ever mentioned the nationality or the language one spoke. We just didn't bother.

The famine

This beautiful new life ended in autumn 1932 when famine [5](#) started in Ukraine. I remember swollen dying people. Dead bodies were loaded onto wagons in the morning and taken to the cemetery where they were buried in common graves. They were mainly Ukrainians who came to the town from their villages hoping to get some food. The Ukrainians from the village where my father often went to work supported our family. They brought us whatever little they could share. We also tried to help the needy with whatever we could give them. We ate mamaliga , soup with nettle and herbs. Mama always shared whatever food we had with villagers – she never refused anyone. We were provided little buns or some thin soup at school.

In 1933 the situation began to improve gradually. I studied in my secondary school. I liked parades on 1 May and 7 November [6](#), and taking part in school concerts. There was a Jewish amateur theater in Bershad. It staged plays of popular Jewish authors, mostly of Sholem Aleichem [7](#). I often went to the theater with other boys. I also attended the class of political knowledge in this same club that housed the theater. We sincerely believed in the communist ideals and socialism, I read political books and brochures, and even made reports on the current international political situation presenting them at the club and at school. However strange this may sound, my school activities were in no conflict with my Jewish life and education at home. For me my home and school existed separately. The authorities were adamantly struggling against religion [8](#), destroying churches and synagogues. We were taught that there was no God and I kind of believed it, but at home I willingly followed our Jewish rules and there was no contradiction between the two spheres of life. Before I was to turn 13 the melamed began to visit our home preparing me for the bar mitzvah. There was the only operating synagogue at the time in Bershad where we celebrated my coming of age. Our neighbors and my friends came to a dinner at home in the evening.

In 1937 I finished school. At this time my parents sold our house in Bershad and we moved to live in Lesnichevka village of Odessa region [350 km south of Kiev]. My father had come to work in this village before and had few Ukrainian friends. He was no longer young and could not walk so far

away from home. He wanted to spend more time with the family. My older brother Shmil stayed in Bershad. After finishing school he went to work at the sugar factory and lived in the dormitory. I also left Lesnichevka pretty soon. That same year I entered the general Medical Faculty of the Medical College in Tulchin town near Bershad. I had all excellent marks in my school certificate and had no problem entering this college. I shared my room in the dormitory with 6 other tenants: four Jewish and two Ukrainian guys. Of course, this matter was of no significance for us and we did not just get along well, but were friends. Of course, I could celebrate Sabbath no longer and I had to give up following the kosher rules: carefree and continuously hungry students that we were ate whatever we could get. We received parcels from home, and we opened them and ate the pork at my friend Alyosha had in his parcel and the kigeleh and strudel that my mama brought us. At Easter my Ukrainian friends shared Easter bread with me, and I liked it enormously. Of course, I did my best to celebrate major Jewish holidays with my family at home. At least I never missed my favorite Pesach. There was no synagogue in the village, but we brought matzah from the town. I never failed to spend my favorite holiday in the warm atmosphere of my home with my dearest folks.

Before the war

I joined the Komsomol [9](#) in College. I was also an active Komsomol member and was even elected to the Komsomol committee of my college where I was engaged in the propagandist work. However, the situation was getting more and more difficult. This was the period of mass arrests [Great Terror] [10](#), but we did not know the truth about this period until the 1990s. This was not just a troublesome, but really a contradictory period. I was surprised that yesterday's leaders of the party and the state, Lenin's comrades [11](#), were declared 'enemies of the people' [12](#) one after another, and disappeared from the life of the country. Common people were arrested and vanished. I didn't dare to share my doubts even with my friends, but I think these same issues bothered them as well. I remember the state of subconscious fear: on one hand, our life was improving, there were the sounds of bravura music of new Soviet songs and marches glorifying the Soviet country and inspiring optimism heard from everywhere: on the radio in the streets and in clubs, but on the other hand, there were many primed scared people around, horrible revelatory articles published in newspapers declaring those, who had been our idols and heroes to be enemies, and the strangest thing was that they confessed of having committed terrible crimes. Fortunately, none of my family or friends fell victims to this persecution. The international situation was growing tense. We read about fascism and Hitler wishing to conquer Europe in newspapers, but we didn't know about his actions against Jews. We began to have military training in the college where we were openly told that fascist Germany was a probable enemy of the Soviet Union. However, after execution of the Ribbentrop-Molotov [13](#) Pact, regarding which my friends and I had a rather ambiguous opinion, the open propaganda against Germany stopped. My older brother was recruited to the army, when the Finnish War [14](#) began.

In 1940 I finished my college with honors and was assigned [15](#) to the position of an assistant doctor in Belyayevka village of Odessa region. There was no doctor in Belyayevka and I had to take care of patients with all kinds of diseases having to take prompt and important decisions. I also assisted at childbirth. There was predominantly Ukrainian population in this village. Its residents showed a great deal of respect to me. First of all, because I was an educated and was in demand. There was a nice library in the village and I continued reading to improve my knowledge. I was one of the very

few educated people in the village and I was obliged to conduct political classes, make reports and read lectures on the political situation in the country and in the world. Of course, the essence of those lectures was that everything in the country was wonderful and great. That the only threat we were facing was international imperialism, that nobody would dare to attack us, and if they did, we would defeat them on their own territory – this was how we had been raised and what we believed piously. I made Ukrainian friends, and girls were looking at me, but I knew that I was to marry a Jewish girl since I was a child: my parents convinced me so, and this was an axiom for me. So, I never gave any hope to any girls and treated all of them nicely.

During the war

I was in Belyayevka village, when the Great Patriotic War began. My older brother, who had returned from the Finnish War just few months before, was mobilized to the front on the first day of the war. I went to the front on 7 July 1941 from the district center of Olgopol. My mother was crying. I told her to take care of my younger sister Haya and brother Gersh. I also told them to evacuate, but my father was doubtful about it. He remembered the time of WWI and didn't believe that Germans could be violent toward Jews.

I was given the rank of senior lieutenant of medical service and made commanding officer of the sanitary platoon of 395 rifle division. For few months I took part in combat action providing the first medical aid to wounded military on the combat fields. Our division was retreating like the rest of the army. There were frequent bombings and attacks of the promptly advancing enemy. In autumn we took defense of Mariupol. In October 1941 fascists sent their landing troops to Mariupol and our division was disgracefully defeated. I got into encirclement. I had a through bursting wound in my leg. It caused the hell of pain. Fortunately I had bandages and antiseptic substances to treat my wound. I stayed in the bushed alongside the road for a day or two, and when I understood that the division no longer existed I started on my way back home. Thinking about the fear that never left me during this hard way is terrifying and shameful. My leg ached unbearably and I was hungry and even more so thirsty. Of course, I already knew about harsh treatment of Jews by Germans, and I knew that was hanging by a thread, if anybody knew I was a Jew. Fortunately, I didn't quite look like a Jew and occasionally I went to smaller villages where people gave me food and sometimes I could spend a night in a shed or a hayloft. However, I spent most nights in haylofts or in the woods to stay away from people. I told villagers that I had fallen behind my unit and was wounded: there were many soldiers and officers plodding on the occupied territory. It took me few weeks to get to Lesnichevka where I joined my parents and my younger sister and brother.

My parents had mixed feelings, when they saw me, they felt happy that I was alive, even if I was wounded, but also, they were concerned about my safety: besides being a Jew, I was a commanding officer of the Soviet army. Our village happened to be within the Transnistria zone [16](#). We were the only Jewish family in the village, but fortunately, there were no German or Romanian troops in Lesnichevka. They assigned a senior man in the village, but he knew my father well and respected our family warning us about any arrivals of fascists into the village. Unfortunately, I cannot remember his name. Other Ukrainian villages also helped us as much as they could. They knew that we were Jews, but none of them ever reported on our family. Life was hard like anywhere else in the occupation. My father didn't have a job and all we had to eat was actually what we could grow in our miserable vegetable garden. Occasionally other villagers brought my father eggs or some milk or a piece of pork fat. My mother or father never had any forbidden food while my

brother, my sister and I were glad to have this non-kosher food that was forbidden by our religion. So we lived in Lesnichevka for a whole year, but in January 1943 fascists on motorcycles and policemen broke into the village capturing villagers to send them to Germany. They found out that there was a Jewish family in the village. My parents, my brother and sister were taken to the ghetto in Bershad, and set me to the construction of a bridge near Nikolaev.

This was the hardest year in my life. I was to be there 40 days initially. But I was kept there for 8 months. This was actually a concentration camp. The inmates were young men, who could manage to do the hardest work. We broke stones, carried heavy stone blocks, and installed bridge supports without any construction plant or tools. We slept in caves in the hills like beasts. At dawn the policemen yelled and this was a signal for us to start our drudgery day's toil. We were thin from hunger, ragged and covered with scabs. In the afternoon we were given some thin soup and in the evening we had a glass of carrot tea and a slice of bread. Prisoners were dying every day, but the fascist machine never failed to deliver another group of prisoners from the Pechora concentration camp [17](#), and different ghettos in Transnistria. Those men got as exhausted as we were very soon. At times it seemed to me that I had died and was placed into hell for whatever sins. Once I (by that time I had been in this hell for almost 8 months) rebelled and demanded normal conditions of life. I argued with the policemen. One of them took me to a bridge support, turned me with my face to the wall and fired his machine gun. The bullets broke the support just few centimeters from my face. I fell from horror. Then this policeman approached me, helped me to stand up, slapped me on my shoulder and said in Ukrainian: 'You've got luck...'. I am still unaware whether this happened because he was kind to me or it was his boss' direction. Probably, God had mercy on me. This happened on Saturday. On the following Sunday representatives from another camp arrived to select craftsmen: carpenters and cabinetmakers. I said I was a cabinetmaker. A group of men and I were taken to some place. I still don't know where this was. We drove about 100 kilometers. There were barracks where we were accommodated. His place seemed luxurious to me compared to this hell where I had been before. This happened in winter 1943-44. In late January 1944, when the Soviet army was close, fascists took on their retreat. This must have been such emergency for them that they had just forgotten about us. In early February 1944 there were no Germans or policemen left in the camp. From there I went to Bershad, where my family had been kept.

I didn't have to cover as long the distance as I had to back in 1941, but I was so weak that each kilometer or even meter seemed enormous to me. On 16 February I reached Bershad. There was still a ghetto there and I found my family there: my parents, my brother and sister. They survived the horrors of the ghetto, hunger, violence of policemen and Romanian guards and hard forced labor. They looked terrible and I looked no better after being kept in the camp. I sat at the table and mama gave me some thin soup that seemed more delicious than any prewar chicken soup, so starved I was. We talked in the evening. My parents told me how they managed to survive how they bribed the policemen and Romanian guards, and how Ukrainian villagers brought them potatoes and beans to the gate of the ghetto. They stayed in an empty house that belonged to some Jews who had evacuated. There were many such houses in the ghetto. Mama kept my sister in hiding in the basement to save her from evil eyes and raptorial eyes of the occupants who raped and killed young girls. There had been an action conducted shortly before I arrived. A traitor reported on a group of inmates who collected money for the partisan unit of Yasha Thales, a Komsomol activist from Bershad. They found the lists and killed all people whose names were on the list. My parents did not fully recover from the horror of this massacre and feared that fascists

might kill all inmates of the ghetto before their retreat. Perhaps this was their intention, but they just didn't have time to do this. On 16 March, one month after I arrived in the ghetto, the Soviet army came into Bershad. There was no battle: fascists just ran away hastily. I remember how exhausted and intimidated inmates of the ghetto went to meet the Soviet tanks, how they kissed the soldiers crying from the mixed feeling of happiness and grief. The field kitchen provided food to the survivors.

I realized that my documents about recruitment me to the army were lost during the mess and confusion of the retreat in 1941, or else I could be subject to the tribunal for desertion. Therefore, when I received a subpoena from the military registry office, I just didn't mention that I had been in the army before. On 28 March 1944 I went to the Soviet army again. This time I was assigned to the position of a sergeant of medical service. I served at the Southwestern Front liberating Ukraine, Moldavia. We were in Nove Zamky town, [today] Slovakia, when the war was over. The situation then was very different from what it was like back in 1941. We were advancing on all fronts chasing the enemy away from our homelands. We were high-spirited to fight and take revenge. We felt like having no mercy and killing all those who caused so much suffering exterminating hundreds of our compatriots – Jews, Russians and Ukrainians, raped our women and killed old people. My heart was tormented from the feeling that I had actually deserted back in 1941, however unintentionally, and I did my best to redeem my fault in the past. I went to the front line evacuating the wounded soldiers and officers, though this was not my direct duty: I was to receive the wounded and provide medical aid at the medical facility. On 13 January I was sent to the rear of the enemy with a group of surveyors. This happened in Bohemia. We stayed in an ambush for few days and I had my both feet frost-bitten. I massaged them and did whatever possible considering the circumstances, but I never fully recovered afterward. On 15 April 1945 I was wounded by a mine splinter and shell-shocked in Nove Zamky town. I was taken to hospital and demobilized later. I returned to Bershad in late 1945.

After the war

We stayed in this house for few months till its owners returned from evacuation. We received a small two-bedroom apartment. We would have waited for lodging longer, but my brother and I were veterans of the war and had some benefits compared to others. Shmil was a tank man. He was wounded in his chest at the end of the war. He had to stay quite a while in hospital and returned home in 1946. Later my older brother got married and moved out to live with his wife. My younger brother Gersh moved to Odessa [18](#) after finishing school where he entered a Medical College. He was fond of biology and medicine since his childhood. After the war we changed our Jewish names to more common and habitual in the Ukrainian surrounding: Shmil to Semyon, Gersh to Grigoriy, Haya to Klara and I became Anatoliy – this name had some resemblance to Naftul.

I went to work as an assistant doctor in villages and later I got a job at the surgery room in the polyclinic in Bershad where I met my future wife. She came to visit her sister Yeva working in the next-door office. Yeva introduced me to her. Beila Rabinovich was a little older than me. She was born in Bershad in 1918. Her father Naum Rabinovich owned a butcher's store. After 1917 he worked in a store. After finishing school Beila worked as an accountant. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War their family evacuated to Tashkent where Naum, the head of the family, died. Beila, her sister Yeva and their mother Esther Rabinovich returned to Bershad after the war. Beila's older brother Israel perished at the front. I liked Beila a lot. We saw each other for a while

and got married in 1947. My fiancée and I were Komsomol members, but Jewish traditions were more important for us. We had a ceremony in the chuppah at the synagogue in Bershad, though nobody, but our families knew about this event. We had a traditional wedding party with klezmer musicians playing the whole night in Beila's home. I moved to Beila's home where we had a small room for ourselves. There were three rooms in their house: one was of my mother-in-law, and Yeva's family lived in another. In 1948 Beila gave birth to a girl, but the baby died few days later. My wife could have no more children. Beila and I had a good life together. We loved a room from my work. In 1954 my mother died from cancer. We moved in with my father. Five years later my mother-in-law Esther passed away. We returned to live in my wife's house. In the middle 1970s it was pulled down and we received this two-bedroom apartment.

The first postwar years were marked with hunger and life was hard. Gradually the situation began to improve. Though I was engaged in medicine, the anti-Semitic campaigns of the late 1940s-early 1950s [Doctors' Plot] [19](#) had no impact on me. I don't think there was as much anti-Semitism in Bershad as in bigger towns. Perhaps, this had to do with the fact that Jews constituted the major part of the population before and after the Great Patriotic War. I remember Stalin's death in 1953, and the mourning meeting attended by all employees of the polyclinic. Like all Soviet people I sincerely grieved after the leader: it never occurred to us that that he was the cause of our hardships. I took an active part in public activities, but I never intended to join the party. I was a propagandist, agitator, a member of the local trade union committee and public control. I always supported the line of the party and the government. The Jewish traditions that we always observed in my parents' home gradually elapsed in the course of time. We didn't observe traditions in my family, though we always celebrated Pesach and had matzah, but I did not go the synagogue. We celebrated all Soviet holidays and went to parades with our colleagues and friends. In the evening my friends got together at our home, my wife cooked dinner, we sat at the table telling stories, laughing, then danced, sang our favorite Soviet songs and had lots of fun. We were not that wealthy, but we managed to buy new furniture, a washing machine, a fridge and everything we needed on installments. The military registry office arranged for me to go to military recreation homes 6 times, as an invalid of the war. My wife and I went to the sea several times. Basically, our life was no different from the others.

My father never recovered from my mother's death. He continued making and fixing winter coats for some time before he retired. He died in 1984, 30 years after my mother's death. My older brother Semyon married Riva from Odessa shortly after the war and moved to Odessa. They had a daughter, whose name I don't remember. My brother was an invalid and was very ill. We saw each other few times, when my wife and I visited them in Odessa. He died in 1989. His wife also passed away. Their daughter lives in Australia. My younger brother Grigoriy finished Odessa Medical College and got a job assignment to Blagoveschensk town in the Far East. In Odessa he married Rosa, a Jewish girl, and they moved to where he was to work. My brother became an assistant professor and lectured in the Medical College. We only greeted each other on holidays. He died in 1991. He had a daughter and a son, whose names I don't remember and have no contacts with them. All I know is that they were still in Blagoveschensk few years ago. My sister Klara married Yankel Geizer, a Jewish man from Bershad. They had two children and lived with my father in Bershad. Her son's name is Roman, but I cannot remember his daughter's name. Klara worked as a typist and a secretary. In the early 1990s their family moved to Israel where Klara died.

When emigration was allowed, many Jewish families left Bershad for Israel, USA and now many move to Germany. My wife or I never considered emigration. We had an all right life here. I've always been interested in the situation in Israel – the 6-Day War [20](#), the War of the Judgment Day [Yom Kippur War] [21](#), but I didn't want to move to our historical motherland fearing hardships and obscurity. However, I just cannot understand the Jews, who move to Germany. I shall never forgive Germans for what they had done to Jews.

I worked well and helped common people. My wife and I had a good life and I believe, I've had a good life in general. My wife passed away in 1990. I am alone now. Now Jewish communities, cultural centers and Jewish press are developing in Ukraine as a result of the perestroika and breakup of the USSR. Though I miss the great country building an ideal society, but I stick to the reality of today. I've become an active member of the Jewish community. I can say I've returned to my roots. Every day I go to the synagogue, this small half-ruined building that we, Jews, are repairing on our own. I pray putting on my tallit and tefillin. I have an old prayer book, the one that my grandfather Shmil had. I know the mourning prayers that I am often asked to recite over the deceased. I recite the Kaddish in the Jewish cemetery where my parents and my wife were buried. This is wonderful that the Jewish community has revived, that people can turn back to the religion and traditions of their nation, I am very grateful to those, who support this process in Ukraine, their assistance is very significant: from the material standpoint, but mainly, from the moral side: they help us, old people to get rid of this acute sense of loneliness. I have friends, who are alone like me, and we are clients of the Hesed [22](#). We celebrate Jewish holidays together, recall our past life and learn about Israel. I cannot help admiring this country and its people. I might very well move to Israel with a bunch of my friends, I would be reluctant to do this on my own.

GLOSSARY:

[1](#) Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

[2](#) Gangs

During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

[3](#) Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which

came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

4 All-Union pioneer organization

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

5 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.

6 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 day 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.

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

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem 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 Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

8 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.

9 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.

10 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.

11 Lenin (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

12 Enemy of the people

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

13 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

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

14 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red

Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

15 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.

16 Transnistria

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

17 Pechora camp

On 11 November 1941 the civil governor of Transnistria issued the deportation of Jews. A camp for Jewish residents of Tulchin (3005 in total) was established in Pechora village Vinnytsya region in December 1941. This is known as the 'Dead Loop'. In total about 9000 people from various towns in Vinnytsya region were kept in the camp. They were accommodated in the former 2-storied recreation center building. There were up to 50 tenants in one room. No provisions were made for the most basic necessities of the inmates. Inmates hardly got any food and the building had no heating. About 2 500 Jews were taken away by Germans for forced labor. None of them returned, they all died from forced labor beyond their strength, lack of food, hunger and diseases. In March 1944 Soviet troops liberated the camp. There were 1550 survivors left in the camp.

18 Odessa

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were heders in 19 prayer houses.

19 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.

20 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

21 Yom Kippur War

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

22 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.