

Klara-Zenta Kanevskaya

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St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Olga Egudina

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I met Klara-Zenta Iosefovna Kanevskaya in her small cozy apartment in one of the new districts of St. Petersburg.

From the first minutes of our dialogue Zenta Iosefovna – this is the way she asks me to call her – really enchants her interlocutor.

Her affability, brilliant sense of humor, sincere interest in life can leave nobody indifferent.

*Looking at her beautiful face, you understand the correctness of the following statement:
worthy people become wonderfully improved in their appearance with age.*

*Listening to the story of her life, one remembers the words of Tutchev:
'Blessed is he who visits this life at its fateful moments of strife...'
[Fedor Ivanovich Tutchev (1803-1873) was one of the greatest Russian poets.*

The lines quoted here are from his poem 'Cicero.'] She witnessed almost all the terrible events of the last century. She had to go through the time of the rise of Fascism in Germany, the period of Great Terror in the USSR [1](#), and the blockade of Leningrad [2](#).

*Sometimes her story may appear taciturn and insufficiently emotional:
we understand that she does her best to overcome the horror of her painful recollections not to excite pity in her companion.*

- [My family background](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [After the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

- **My family background**

Unfortunately, I know absolutely nothing about my distant ancestors. You see, I'm already so old that it is strange that I remember anything at all. But the reason is not my forgetfulness: my parents told me nothing about them.



Never mind my distant ancestors; I know very little even about my grandmothers and grandfathers. I can only guess their names on the basis of my parents' patronymics. My paternal grandfather's name was Abram Elenevich, and my maternal grandfather's name was Lev Kesselman. I can give you only approximate dates of their lives. My maternal grandfather lived to about 77 years and died in 1916, having outlived his wife by many years: my maternal grandmother died at the age of 33. And my fathers' parents died approximately at the same age: they both were 75-80 years old. It happened during World War I.

My mom's parents lived in Lvov. It was in Western Galicia [3](#), therefore my Mom spoke excellent German, and it was of good service to her later. My father's parents lived in what today is Poland. There was a small town called Lomzha near Grodno. At some point my father's parents lived in Irkutsk on trade business, and my father [Iosef Elenevich] was born there. Unfortunately I don't know the details. Later they returned to Lomzha.

Both my grandfathers were engaged in trade. It was natural for the grandmothers not to work: they stayed at home, giving birth to children and keeping the house. Members of both families spoke Yiddish at home. My father's parents also spoke Polish, and my mother's parents spoke German. I don't know the way my grandmothers and grandfathers dressed, but I do know that my grandmothers didn't wear wigs.

I can tell you almost nothing about their family life. I heard stories that the parents of my mom had a garden, which always gave them a rich harvest of cherries and apples. I don't remember, whether they kept domestic animals, it seems to me that they kept poultry. And my father's parents kept goats.

Neither the family of my father's parents, nor the family of my mother's parents had helpers at home: they had not enough success in life for that.

My grandmothers and grandfathers were religious, but not fanatic [Zenta means: not that zealous]. They went to the synagogue, celebrated holidays, kept the fast on Yom Kippur.

I know nothing about the political views of my grandfathers. Unfortunately I also know nothing about their relations with their neighbors. I know for sure that they never left their places for vacations.

I was born in Berlin. A little bit later I'll tell you about the way my parents ended up there. We all are well aware of what Berlin looked like at the beginning of the 20th century. Here I'd like to speak about the Jewish Berlin. These facts are less known, and besides due to well known reasons this Berlin has disappeared without leaving a trace. A lot of Jews lived in Berlin. The Jewish community of Berlin was not only very large – the largest in Germany – but also very influential. Suffice it to say that when we lived in Berlin, there were 18 community synagogues and besides that about 20 private ones. There were also Hasidic [4](#) synagogues, Reform and Sephardic [5](#) ones. Naturally, in the city there were many rabbis and cantors. Certainly there were shochetim, but our family never used their services: you see, everywhere around there were shops, where they sold kosher meat.

At synagogues and meeting-houses there were mikves. In Berlin there were various Jewish educational institutions, for example my sister and I studied at a Jewish school. There were both cheders and yeshivot. In general it is possible to say that alongside the German Berlin there

existed and flourished a Jewish Berlin. The whole Jewish residential area was situated in the city center, not far from our place. There was a choral synagogue there. Sometimes Daddy took us there, because it was famous for its cantors.

In 1938 it was burnt to ashes. By now its building has been restored, and it houses a museum and community center. On the territory of the school where we studied, there was a whole complex: a girls' school, an orphanage for girls, a cooking school, a polyclinic, a boarding house for teachers. I know this boarding house well. The thing is that I had a serious speech impediment. I had special lessons with a speech therapist at the polyclinic. As I lived rather far from my school, my teacher arranged for me to stay and have dinner at that boarding house on certain days, when I had my speech therapy lessons. It was there where I learned my table manners: to use a napkin, a support for knives and forks, etc. – you see, when parents teach their children to do something the right way, the children often pay no attention to them. In this complex there also was an old people's home, and the Nazis killed all its inmates.

In Berlin there was no specially separated district where Jews had to live. To tell the truth, a Jewish residential area did exist. Poor Jews lived there, that area was very dirty. But nobody forced people to live there. For example, we didn't live there; we lived in the city center.

Jews had no typical occupation. They were engaged in different businesses. As usual, there was a significant number of Jews-handicraftsmen. A lot of Jews were engaged in trade, there were many lawyers, bankers, doctors. Most Jewish emigrants from Russia were educated people.

I remember not a single house in Berlin without water and electricity supply.

My father was thoroughly versed in politics. He always kept abreast of it. I was a child, and he already taught me to read newspapers. At that time in Germany mainly Social Democrats stroke the keynote of policy, and my father sympathized with Communists. My father not only made no secret of his views, but even put them on show out of bravado. He received by post the newspaper 'Rote Fahne.' ['Die rote Fahne' (Red Flag) was a German newspaper (1918-1939), since 31st December 1918 it belonged to the Communist Party of Germany. In Germany its publication was suppressed in 1933, and till 1939 it was issued in Prague and later in Brussels.] He was a subscriber and used to read it openly in the street, when it was already better not to do it.

Communists never won elections; they usually had the second or third place. Mom was always absolutely nonpolitical. I'd like to say that nostalgia was not an empty phrase for my father, he always wanted to return to Russia or, rather, already to the Soviet Union. To tell the truth, he knew nothing about what was going on in the USSR. You see, the October revolution [6](#) happened, when he was in captivity.

Until 1933 I came across no expressions of anti-Semitism. And here I'd like to tell you in detail about the first time I confronted this phenomenon. It happened when not only our family, but the whole mankind faced anti-Semitism. It was the beginning of one of the most terrible tragedies of the 20th century.

In January 1933 both my brother and I got ill with scarlet fever. At that time scarlet fever was considered to be a serious disease, and we were taken to a hospital. We were placed in the isolation ward situated on the ground floor of the hospital, so that visitors could communicate with

children through the window. Our parents came to visit us three times a week. One day Daddy came and told me the following: 'You see, don't feel hurt if possibly we won't come to see you so often: at present it is very uneasy in the city – Hitler has come to power, and it means Fascism.'

I had already heard about Fascism. Together with my sister we spent vacations in a children's rest home in 1932 and saw the 'brownshirts' [SA men were often called "brownshirts," for the color of their uniforms] marching and singing the 'Horst-Wessel-Lied' [the "Horst Wessel Song" also known as "Die Fahne hoch" ("The flag on high," from its opening line), was the anthem of the Nazi Party from 1930 to 1945.

From 1933 to 1945 it was also part of Germany's national anthem.] and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.' [Das Lied der Deutschen ("The Song of the Germans," also known as "Das Deutschlandlied", "The Song of Germany") has been used wholly or partially as the national anthem of Germany since 1922. Outside Germany, the hymn is sometimes informally known by the opening words and refrain of the first stanza, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles," but this was never the title of the original work. The music was written by Joseph Haydn, the lyrics by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Information for these editor's notes culled from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/>] Merely by intuition I understood that it was something terrible and very bad. I felt strong aggression in it. You know, children understand much more than adults usually think.

My brother was the first to be discharged from the hospital. My case caused kidney complication, and I was kept in the hospital longer. By the way all the doctors in the hospital were Jews. Later I also returned home, and it seemed that our life returned to normal, but it was nothing like that.

• During the war

On the evening of 31st March – it was Friday – 15 men entered our apartment by force and started beating my father. Mom seized my sister's hand and ran to the police station for help. But the police already were on the side of these bandits. Our neighbor, a widow – a very stout woman – took my brother, who was one and a half years old. She put him on her stomach, and he was hidden from view. They went on beating my father in my presence. Suddenly another neighbor, a wife of a Nazi – SS soldier – entered. [SS: abbreviation of "Schutzstaffel," German for "Protective Squadron" – a privileged military organization of the Nazi Party in Germany.]

She shouted at the pogrom-makers: 'What are you doing? Have these people done anything wrong to you?' She took me to her place. You see, she didn't care a bit about her husband's views on life, if it was necessary to rescue a child. In their family there was a boy, an awful hooligan, one year younger than me. Right at the time, when we stayed in the hospital, he fell down from a scaffolding and broke his arms and legs. So that hooligan, having not recovered yet after his injuries, approached me, wiped away my tears and said, 'Don't be afraid, Zenta, everything will be OK.' As for me, I already knew how OK it would be! The neighbor gave me strong sweet tea to drink, and also some tranquilizer drops. Later she saw me to the door of our apartment.

And meanwhile Father's torturers took him away to a neighboring pub. They were going to go on beating him, but already in the presence of the pub customers. But at that time two underground members of the Communist Party were present there. They knew my father very well: it happened

in our district, where people knew each other. They asked: 'What are you beating him for?' – 'He called Hitler an Austrian.' – 'Who heard it?' – 'My wife.' – 'Well, your wife can't be a witness.'

At that time Fascism only started gathering strength, and their interference was enough to stop the tormenting of my father. He was brought home covered in blood. As it turned out later, he had concussion of the brain. All the rest of his life he suffered from severe headaches. My parents immediately decided to leave for the USSR. Especially because the day after my father was beaten up, they arranged a Jewish Boycott in Berlin. It was the day, when nobody was allowed to buy from Jewish shops. They gave people the opportunity to enter a Jewish shop, and beat them at the exit.

I don't remember any patriotic holidays, but I remember well political mass-meetings under the leadership of Thälmann. It happened in 1931 or 1932. [Thälmann, Ernst (1886-1944): the leader of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) during much of the Weimar Republic. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1933 and held in solitary confinement for eleven years, before being shot in Buchenwald on Adolf Hitler's orders in 1944. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Th%C3%A4lmann]

One day Daddy took both my sister and me to one such political mass-meeting. It took place in the square, where the Headquarters of the Communist Party Central Committee was situated. During Thälmann's speech a desultory fire started. It was the police action intended to disperse the meeting participants that way. Daddy seized us; we ran away and took cover behind a street-door nearby. When we returned home, Mom started a scandal, whereas normally she never used gross terms. She said to my father, 'Next time go by yourself where you want, but don't touch the children.' And we weren't frightened. Nothing was frightening when we were with Daddy.

I don't remember us singing any patriotic songs. Songs that we heard in Germany didn't inspire us. Later, in the USSR we also tried not to sing Soviet songs.

When I try to recall a market day, nothing comes to my mind. It seems that in such a large city as Berlin, there was no such thing called a market day. In any case, in spite of the fact that we lived very close to the market, I don't remember anything special to be arranged there on certain days. We visited the market very rarely. Year by year we went to the same shops. Meat and sausage we bought at the butcher's in a Jewish shop. Black and white bread and Viennese muffins were delivered at our door every morning. I still remember the smell and taste of those muffins, for ever and aye it means for me the smell of a happy childhood. We didn't buy milk in a Jewish shop. And the owners of the shop for colonial produce were Jewish. We, the children, were sent to the shops very often, but our parents didn't entrust us with money. The shop owners scored up the bought goods, and our parents paid for them later. We went to the market only to buy fresh fish. My mom was a real cordon bleu.

I already told you about the political mass-meetings under the leadership of Thälmann and about the situation after Hitler came to power. I guess it is all I remember about the political events of that time. A good few in fine!

Now I'd like to tell you about my parents. By now nobody in the world except me is able to do it. My mom [Berta Kesselman] was a mild tempered person, a gentle mother, a devoted wife and a houseproud woman. As far as I remember she raised her voice only three times. The first time it happened, when they were beating Daddy in her presence. The second time it happened already in

Leningrad [today St. Petersburg]. Shortly after Daddy was arrested, the house manager came to us and said that it was necessary to change our apartment papers, because the number of our family members had decreased. [House managers usually were in close contact with the NKVD [7](#)] My Mom bawled at him in the full sense of the word. You see, he talked to us supposing that my father would never get back. Mom couldn't reconcile herself to it - and she appeared to be right, though the return home of my father was a real miracle. I'll tell about it later.

And for the third time she shouted already at me, but again in connection with Daddy. When Daddy was arrested, we went to Kresty prison, trying to find out something about his destiny. [Kresty ('crosses' in Russian) was a prison in St. Petersburg. Its buildings form a cross, thus the name. In the 1930s this prison was overcrowded with victims of Stalin's mass repressions.] Mom went there alone more often. One day when I was there, I saw a man who came up to a lady standing in line - probably he was an NKVD officer - and took her with him somewhere. I never saw that woman again. I told Mom that I wouldn't let her go to the prison alone, and I would go there myself. And Mom shouted at me, and I rolled on the floor in a crying fit. You see, I was afraid to lose my mother, as I had already lost my father.

From my story it is evident that Mom raised her voice only on extraordinary occasions. She had a gentle sense of humor. My father was absolutely different. He was kind, but always ready with sarcasm. He was able to give us, the children, a dab. He wasn't angry, but very effusive. He managed to hurt the feelings of many people. I am his daughter, but my nature is gentler, probably because I am a woman.

My father, Iosef Abramovich Elenevich, was born on 7th June 1888 in Irkutsk. Daddy finished cheder, and then studied in Germany in an educational institution for specialists in weaving, where he became a good expert in textile fabrics. He died on 23rd December 1941 in besieged Leningrad.

My mother Berta Lvovna - according to her documents her name was Bredle Abramovna, and she had no idea where that name came from, because her father was called Lev - Kesselman was born on 17th March 1888 in Lvov. Mom studied only in an elementary school. Their mother tongue was Yiddish. But they also spoke Polish, German and Russian. She died on 6th March 1942 in besieged Leningrad.

Now I'd like to tell you, how my parents turned up in Berlin. In 1912 my father was conscripted. He served in Siberia. And in 1914, when he was about to be demobilized, World War I broke out. He was sent to the front line, and at the end of 1915 he was taken prisoner. While he was held captive, his parents died. Father knew that nobody waited for him at home. And in Berlin there lived his sister [Hava] and her family. To my regret I know nothing about her, I remember only - my parents told me - that she was a real beauty. Father went to Berlin having not a shot in the locker. In Berlin, in a cafe or a pub, he joined a company to play cards. And he was lucky: he won 14 marks. It was the last time in his life he played cards for stakes. He wasn't a reckless player: that chance gain of 14 marks was a necessity want for him. So he started his new life in the new country from this insignificant sum.

At that time in Germany there was sustained inflation. My father traveled about the country, from village to village, bought potatoes there and later sold them in the city. At that time he could do nothing else, because he had no profession. Later he became a good expert in fabrics and even devolved his knowledge to me. Until now I show discrimination in fabrics. At first Daddy set up a

little shop in Berlin together with one of his acquaintances. I don't remember what they sold. Later my father's partner married an ugly, but very rich girl and became a great merchant. Their paths parted. And my father set up a little drapery store and besides he was often invited to give consultations.

My mom left home in 1905. She had a bad-tempered stepmother; all my grandfather's children of the first bed left home. My Mom went to Berlin. At first she got a job as a cook in a Jewish restaurant, later she became a head-cook there. In Berlin she met my Daddy. They got married in 1922. Of course, having become a married woman, my Mom immediately gave up her work.

I don't know their love story in detail; I only remember that according to them, they were especially introduced to each other by someone. Of course they got married in a synagogue under a chuppah, according to all the rules. After their marriage in the synagogue they forgot to get registered in the state institution, it caused problems when I was already born. Several weeks after my birth I had my mother's family name, Kesselman. Then they got registered and I was given my father's surname.

Our family was of moderate means. My parents had three children, and always only Father worked. Everyone was satisfied with food, provided with shoes and clothes; the children studied. But we never lived in luxury. After we moved to the USSR, the level of our well-being didn't change: we remained on the average level. But unfortunately the average level in the USSR was – and unfortunately is – much lower than that in Germany.

In Germany we lived in an ordinary three-room apartment. How rich it was in comparison with our next dwellings! There we had a nursery, our parents' bedroom and a dining-room. The furniture was ordinary for that time. Certainly we had a water supply, but no central heating. There was stove heating. There was a gas stove, but when it was necessary to cook a lot, Mom burnt wood in another stove. At home we had no pets. Of course we had no garden.

Nobody ever helped Mom about the house, though many times Daddy offered her to hire a day servant at least. She always refused: she didn't want to see an outsider at home. We had a lot of books at home. All of us liked to read, especially Daddy. But he had almost no time for reading. When we lived in Germany, all our books were in German, except religious ones, which were in Hebrew.

As far as religious books are concerned, Daddy had a twelve-volume edition of religious texts, and Mom had the same one, but issued for women – of a smaller format. We didn't visit libraries, Daddy subscribed to newspapers – mainly Communist ones.

My parents weren't very religious people. Until 1941 our family members celebrated all Jewish holidays. We went to the synagogue, especially in Germany. To tell the truth, my parents dressed as secular people. My father was a fine singer. This skill helped him to find his place in the Jewish community: he was the man who sang hymns at the end of Sabbath, after dark. I've forgotten the words, but I remember the melody until now.

While we lived in Germany, my father sympathized with Communists. But when we arrived in the USSR, he said almost at once: 'Terrific! Where have I brought my family!' My parents weren't members of any Party.

My father did his military service in the tsarist army, and later he participated in World War I. He was awarded two St. George Crosses [8](#) for personal bravery.

Our neighbors were mainly Germans, because we didn't live in a Jewish residential area. We always were on good terms with them. I already told you about our neighbors who saved us when my father was attacked. There was one more family: they had two adult sons. The pogrom-makers invited those guys to beat my father with them. They refused: 'We are brought up differently, these people did us no harm.' Since then I never identified all German people with Fascists. Later, in the USSR the meaning of the word neighbor changed. There appeared a new type of neighbors – communal flat-mates. I'll talk about them a little bit later.

We had no relatives in Berlin, only friends and acquaintances – of my father, mainly. I had my schoolmates. Obviously my parents paid attention to the nationality of their friends and acquaintances: almost all of them were Jews. While we lived in Germany, my parents never left Berlin for vacations.

I remember almost nothing about the relatives of my parents. Mom had brothers; they sometimes came to visit us in Berlin. I remember only their names: Yakov and Leo. I remember my father's sister Hava. At first she lived in Berlin, then left for Poland, for Lomzha wherefrom she sometimes came to visit us in Berlin. She was a housewife, married to a lawyer.

• Growing up

I was born on 11th April 1923 in Berlin. Until I was four I stayed at home with Mom, then I was sent to a Jewish kindergarten, and at the age of six I already went to school. We had neither a nurse, nor a governess. My mother tongue was German. I don't remember what I occupied myself with at home. I never felt bored. When I was one, my sister was already born. This small age difference allowed us to play together.

In 1928 I was sent to a Jewish girls' school. All subjects, except Hebrew and Bible [Old Testament] were taught in German. It was an eight-year school, but I studied there only five years, because in 1933 we left Germany. I'd like to tell you about it a little bit later. At school I was interested only in humanitarian subjects. I liked German language and Hebrew very much, and hated mathematics. We had only one teacher for all subjects – Fräulein [Miss] Fanye Bergas, she taught us all subjects but singing and PT. By the way, at the singing lessons we studied the flute. Unfortunately, I didn't succeed. At our school there was no anti-Semitism, and of course it couldn't exist there. Besides this basic school, I attended a Sunday school, where we studied Hebrew more intensively than at my school. There we also studied the history of the Jewish people.

I made friends basically with girls from my class. Certainly all of them were Jewish. One of them lived in the same street as us, and most often I communicated with her. Twice a week I went to lessons with a speech therapist at the polyclinic, therefore I had little free time. I didn't take a great interest in anything. I never liked to do sports. We spent almost all our free time, days off and vacations with our parents. We liked to go for long walks. Most often we went for a walk around the city, but sometimes to the suburbs. Not far from our house there was a very beautiful park, and it was our favorite place. Daddy took us to side-shows in the park. Once a year, the school administration took all of us out of the city for a picnic and overnight stay. It was unforgettable.

Unfortunately, we spent the night not in tents, but in houses, but nevertheless all of us were very enthusiastic about it. Several times during our summer holidays my sister and I were sent to the Baltic Sea with members of the Russian-Jewish Emigrant Society. Daddy was acquainted with an employee of that society, his surname was Ox – by the way, later he left for Palestine. Under his patronage – because we weren't emigrants – we went to the Baltic Sea and to Thuringia [Germany]. We used to spend one and a half months there. And in Thuringia we used to live in the Catholic rest house, a part of which they granted on lease to that society.

When we had to go somewhere within the city limits, we went by bus. Only on extraordinary occasions we went by automobile. I remember, when my sister injured her arm, Mom took her to the doctor by car together with me – not to leave me home alone. It was approximately in 1930. So, a ride in a car was a real event. And a local train ride was the ordinary way for us to go out of the city.

We never went to restaurants. Why should we go to a restaurant, if our Mom was a chef-cook? My parents had three children. I'll tell you about my sister and brother, though unfortunately the story about my brother will be extremely short, like an inscription on a grave stone.

My sister was born on 18th May 1924 in Berlin. Her name was Margotte. She was very beautiful, in contrast to me. She attended the same Jewish school as me. Later, already in Leningrad, before the war broke out, she managed to finish nine grades. After the end of the war she entered a Pharmaceutical Technical School. She finished it and worked as a pharmacist all her life: at first in Priozersk of Leningrad region, later in Leningrad, and then in Israel. My sister was married twice. Her first husband was a camera-man. He was at the front line during the war. His name was Vladimir Alexandrovich Galperovich. He shot films about the Leningrad region and traveled much around it. Once, having arrived in Priozersk he met my sister and fell in love with her: she was a real beauty. Soon they got married, and moved to Leningrad. They lived in her husband's apartment. Unfortunately Vladimir Alexandrovich died of a heart attack when he was only 57 years old.

In 1974 my sister got married for the second time. Her second husband was 13 years older. He was a hairdresser. His name was Abram Supyan. He died at the age of 90. In 1976 they immigrated to Israel. There in 1996 my sister died during an open heart surgery. The operation lasted seven hours and a half, and she didn't regain consciousness after it.

My brother was born on 23rd November 1931. He died on 24th April 1942 in besieged Leningrad. His name was Leo.

We observed all Jewish traditions until 1941 both in Germany and in Russia. We observed Sabbath only in Germany; in the USSR we couldn't manage to do it: everyone was busy at work, we all came home at different times, and it was impossible to consider the celebration of Sabbath to be a valid reason for absence from duty. My parents went to the synagogue for sure. They also taught their children: I knew a lot of prayers. I remember very well the ceremony of circumcision arranged for my brother. He cried so piteously, the poor boy!

I loved all Jewish holidays and till now I consider them to be very good for uniting family members. At home we always kept Pesach kitchenware, and I remember that joyful feeling, when my parents got it out of the cupboard before Pesach.

We usually celebrated holidays in the bosom of our family; we had only one visitor – a widow, our acquaintance. Sometimes we also made visits, but preferred to spend holidays at home.

Now I'll tell you about our return to the USSR. All his life my father sympathized with Communists, and he would have returned to the USSR with pleasure, even if in Germany there had been no pogroms. But Mom wouldn't hear of it. The reason was that she was really religious, and the way they behaved towards religious people in the USSR was already well known [9](#). But after Hitler came to power, it became clear that we had no choice. After the events I have described above, we immediately addressed the Soviet Consulate and left Germany in June 1933.

It was easy for us to obtain sanction for departure and admission into the USSR because we were Soviet citizens. The point was that when my father stayed in Germany – after he had been delivered from captivity, he didn't ask for German citizenship. And when the first ambassador of the Soviet state appeared in Berlin, Daddy applied for Soviet citizenship and was granted it. Mom – as his wife – and his children also became Soviet citizens automatically.

From Berlin we went to Hamburg and then on by steamship Herten [10](#). It wasn't a passenger boat, and the conditions were so-so. Our furniture we sent from Berlin to the USSR by container traffic a week before our departure. We sewed many warm cloths, because we were going to be confronted by intense cold. We sailed three day, and landed at the Leningrad seaport. There we found out that nobody was waiting for us. And several Englishmen and an American who sailed on board the same ship were met in the port. We understood that the reason was that we were Soviet citizens. Where to go, where to sleep, what to eat – we knew nothing. Someone said that it was necessary to go to Smolny. [Smolny monastery is a monument of architecture in St. Petersburg. Under the Communists its building housed municipal governing bodies.] So we went to Smolny to see the Chairman of the Leningrad Executive Committee [11](#). Daddy left us in the street near Smolny with our luggage and entered the building. It was night time, but at that time of year Leningrad nights were white. [St. Petersburg's position below the Arctic Circle causes twilight to last all night in May, June and July. This phenomenon is known as the "white nights."] We were waiting for Daddy for a rather long time. The situation was frightening. Then he came out and said that they sent us to the Severnaya hotel. We lived there for several days. And it is necessary to mention here that at that time we didn't have a penny.

Then they sent us to the Jewish Agricultural Society, which was situated on Nekrassova Street. [The Jewish Agricultural Society was created in 1924 to provide financial, medical, educational and cultural assistance to Jews, who were going to be engaged in farm-work.] We were lodged in the accounts department. The employees of that department had to crowd together in one room, leaving the second one to us. There we lived for two or three months. We went to Smolny to have dinner. There we had a meal free-of-charge, but only dinner. Mom sold our things at the market. Daddy started working as a work-master at a cotton mill.

My sister and I were sent to the German school on Krukov channel embankment. You see, we couldn't speak a word of Russian. At the school the first shift started in the morning and was German, the second one started in the afternoon and was Russian. I went to the 3rd grade, and my sister – to the 2nd. The school was remarkably good! All subjects except Russian language were taught in German. Till now I remember our teacher of Russian language, Anna Iosefovna Pinsker. She was over 80 years of age, lived in the suburb of the city, and each day went to work by train. I

know the Russian language thanks to her. That school – as well as other national schools in Leningrad – was closed in 1938. [In 1918 Soviet authorities permitted national minorities to teach their children at schools in their mother tongue. But in 1938 they issued an edict ordering to teach all schoolchildren in Russian.]

And in the meantime we still lived in the accounts department. But you know: we were children. Children are fine everywhere: they will be fed, washed, and put to sleep for sure. And it was hard for my poor mom. She was not accustomed to uncomfortable life as Soviet women were. She was long used to a gas-stove, and here she had to master a primus heater [a portable kerosene burner used for cooking.] They bought a primus heater and put it in the corridor. Soon Mom learned how to clean it using a needle.

When Daddy asked the local authorities to put a living space at our disposal, they said the following: ‘You were born in Irkutsk, so go there.’ Daddy went to the synagogue: he realized that only there he could get some kind of advice. And they told him: ‘If you get even a room in a basement here, it is better than a very good apartment in Irkutsk. In Irkutsk you will play the devil with your family. In the USSR it is possible to live only in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Kharkov. In all other cities people starve.’ Daddy made an appointment with Kodatsky, who was the Chairman of the City Executive Committee at that time. [Kodatsky, Ivan (1893-1937) was a Communist Party leader and a Soviet politician.] When my father entered his study, Kodatsky was drinking tea and eating cake. But it was not for nothing that my father was a St. George chevalier: he was afraid of nothing and nobody. Having seen Kodatsky, who was brassily leaning back in an easy chair and even didn’t offer him to sit, Daddy banged his fist on the table so loudly that the tea glass, the plate and cakes flew every which way. After that, Father immediately got orders for four different rooms to choose from.

My parents chose two rooms – of ten and twelve square meters – in a communal apartment [12](#) on Vassilyevsky Island. Before the Revolution that apartment was occupied by a princess, who emigrated abroad. In the apartment there lived the family of her former housekeeper Darya Nikolaevna; they occupied the best rooms. Darya Nikolaevna appeared to be a very worthy woman, we made friends. And the other neighbors also were very decent people, except the Jewish family. They – parents and three children – lived in a room of 18 square meters. They came from Zhlobin, their father was a shoemaker. Having arrived in Leningrad, they immediately became atheists, and laughed in our faces, because we didn’t eat pork.

And my parents went on observing traditions, tried to buy kosher meat, regularly went to the synagogue. Certainly, they couldn’t celebrate Sabbath. But the Pesach kitchenware brought from Germany was kept in a special box and once a year it was ceremoniously unwrapped. We never celebrated Christmas or Easter: it didn’t occur to us to do it.

Soon Mom also had to get a job, because Father couldn’t support the family alone – we were not in Germany! She managed to find a job of a check-room attendant in a hairdressing saloon. We moved to another apartment, where we had only one room, but it was large and sunny.

Daddy made friends basically with his coworkers. My sister and I also had many friends – one of my schoolmates is still alive. We often went for a walk around the city, visited museums, theaters. I remember that once my sister and I went to Kirovsky Theater [Mariinsky opera and ballet theater was erected in 1793 in St. Petersburg, in 1935 it was named after Kirov, the well-known Soviet

Communist leader] to see the Swan Lake ballet [Swan Lake is a world-famous work by Tchaikovsky, it was premiered in Moscow in 1877], but didn't manage to buy tickets, because that performance always drew capacity audiences. It was a pity to go home and we went to watch the Gershele Ostropoler performance [Gershele Ostropoler is a comedy by Gershenson] of Mikhoels [13](#) theater [the interviewee means Mikhoels Theater – the Soviet State Jewish theater founded in 1919] at the Palace of Culture situated near the Kirovsky Theater. [Palaces of Culture in the USSR arranged different exhibitions, dancing-parties, meetings with famous people; they also invited different touring drama groups]. The performance was very funny, we laughed ourselves to death, laughed all the way home recollecting the episodes, and even at home we bothered our sleepy family members.

My sister and I spent our summer vacations in pioneer camps [14](#). And my brother left for summer dacha [15](#) with his kindergarten. Daddy had rest in a sanatorium twice [sanatoriums arranged conditions for rest and medical treatment of people, usually they were situated in places with climate congenial to health]: his organization gave him a paid authorization. [An enterprise usually sent its employees to have rest in a sanatorium or a rest house at a reduced price.] Mom went to a recreation house [16](#). We never rented a dacha for summer vacation.

As I already mentioned, our school was closed in 1938. All schoolchildren were moved to schools, situated in their districts. By that time I knew Russian very well, and my sister a little bit worse. My compositions on Russian literature were the best; I was always pointed at as an example of what other pupils should do.

By 1937 some sort of vacuum started forming around us. A lot of people around us were arrested. But still life went on. In the summer of 1938 my brother left for summer dacha with his kindergarten, and my sister and I went to a pioneer camp in Siverskaya [Leningrad suburb] for the whole summer. We returned home pleased and happy. And two days after our return our father was arrested. They came to take him at night – as usual – made a search and turned the house upside down. For some reason they took my father's homeopathic medicine. Of course we had understood earlier that Father would be arrested: in the country, where people were arrested each and all, a man of such destiny as my father couldn't survive. I was 15 years old, but I understood everything very well.

They put him into the Kresty prison, and we started our long ordeal. Every ten days I went there. Every ten days it was the turn of 'our letter E.' It was impossible for me to meet Akhmatova [17](#) there: she came on the days of letter G, and I on the days of letter E. [Here the interviewee refers to the fact that in the same period of time Anna Akhmatova went to the Kresty prison to give a parcel to her arrested son – Lev Gumilev.] I used to come to prison by the first tram, and many people had been waiting there since the previous evening. We spent long hours standing in line; I remember well that I was reading 'Les Misérables' by Victor Hugo to while away the time. At last I approached the small window and had to say: 'Elenevich, Iosef Abramovich, born in 1888 in Irkutsk.' Then I gave them money. If they took the money, it meant that Father was alive and not moved anywhere. One day they refused to take money from me. I was told the following: 'He is not here.' – 'And where is he?' – 'Next, please!' I was a very brave girl and went to Ivanov, the warden. May that Ivanov rest in peace! He listened to me, left for somewhere, came back and said: 'Your father was sent to the Far East for ten years without the right to be in correspondence with anybody.' Many years later we got to know that such a verdict meant execution. At that time I

didn't know it, but nevertheless I fainted. They brought me to life, I returned home, and told everything to Mom. Next time she went there herself, and unexpectedly they took money from her.

Later we got to know that right that day, when they told me that my father had been sent away, four hundred prisoners, including him, were taken out to the railway station and put in cars. Suddenly my father was taken off the train and brought back to Kresty. All this he told us after his discharge. And before that a man, a lawyer, visited us at home. He was kept in the same ward as my father. Later he was discharged, and somehow he got to know that my father's case would be taken up through the legal proceedings [it was something unprecedented for that time]. He informed us about the place and time of hearing of the case. Mom and my sister went to that court. They didn't let them in, but Father was discharged right in the courtroom – they dismissed his charge. He had been imprisoned for one year. I don't dare to say only one year, knowing how much he suffered in prison, and how much we suffered at liberty at that time. But in comparison with terms in prison, usual for that time in our country [10-20 years], his term was certainly very short. Possibly the fact that I wrote dozens of letters with a request to discharge my father while he was in prison, had no small part in it. I wrote letters to Stalin, Beriya [18](#), Molotov [19](#). I'd like to think that it was my letters that helped Daddy.

When Daddy got imprisoned, it became clear to us that Mom alone wasn't able to support three children. So, first of all I changed my school for an evening one. [Evening schools gave adult working people an opportunity to get high school education.] Red-haired Vanya Vassilyev was one of my classmates. He worked as a cook at a mechanized canteen. [In the USSR mechanized canteens were large integrated plants which did everything from food processing to cooking meals.] It was he who helped me get my first job. I was hired as an assistant to an accountant at their accounts department. The head of the department was very nice. Her younger sister also worked there, and we made friends.

I had to go round to the canteen sections, collecting different documents. And in each section employees wanted to give me something to eat: a roll, curdled milk, an ice-cream. I felt embarrassed, but I understood that everyone wished me well. After that I worked at the Krasny Oktyabr factory. It was a well known enterprise manufacturing pianos. I worked there as an accountant. Later I worked in a technical school, which prepared projectionists. [Technical schools in the USSR prepared sub-professionals for agricultural, transport and other key industries.] There I got acquainted with very interesting people. You see, I was a young girl, everything was amazing to me, and people who played some part in the film industry seemed to me the real people of art. I left that job, when I entered the 10th grade, aiming to become well prepared and enter a college. At that time I never came across any manifestations of anti-Semitism. Probably I was very lucky with the people around me and places I worked at. As is well known, before the war there were no anti-Semitic witch-hunts, conducted by state authorities, and I never faced the so-called 'everyday' anti-Semitism.

Indeed, the only serious incident in my life connected with anti-Semitism was that beating of my father by fascist-minded thugs in 1933 in Berlin. Later my life in the USSR went on in the ordinary way. In the USSR they arrested people without distinction; starvation also killed people of different nationalities.

I finished school with good marks and entered the 1st Medical College. It was in 1941. But I didn't study there for long. Before the beginning of the academic year my sister and I were sent to dig trenches. [In the first months of war all citizens of Leningrad able to work were mobilized to build field fortifications around the city.] We spent two months there. In fall the college was evacuated, but I couldn't leave: all members of my family were lying motionless dying of starvation. I finished training courses for nurses and worked in a hospital for some time. By that time I also grew weak and very soon had to give up my work.

• After the war

By spring 1942 my parents and my brother died. My sister and I survived, but she couldn't get up any more. I managed to find a job as an unskilled worker at the Vpered factory. That machine-building factory was situated not far from our house and I managed to get there with my last bit of strength. Having worked at the factory for a very short period, I lost my pass. During the war time all factories were considered to be military units, therefore the loss of pass could cause serious troubles. I went to the director, and at that moment a secretary of the Communist Party organization of the factory was present in his study. [The secretary of the factory Communist Party organization was nominally the leader of employees – Communist Party members, but de facto he was in the same position as the director.] They gave me a kind reception and asked a lot of questions about my family. I looked awful, more dead than alive, and they decided to send me to the soup-kitchen for a high-calorie diet. They called for the factory doctor. The doctor said: 'Don't you see that she is not able to reach the soup-kitchen, we should take her to the hospital immediately!' Together with my sister – who was in an even worse state – I was sent to a military hospital, which had allocated 800 beds for citizens of Leningrad, who were suffering from dystrophy. It was in May 1942, trams were already in operation and we took a tram, otherwise it would have been impossible for us to reach the hospital. I'll never forget the friendly reception they gave us. We had a wash and changed our clothes for new and clean ones. In the large ward there were about 50 patients. We spent two months there. We had three meals and 600 grams of bread a day. We hadn't seen so much bread for a long time.

On 22nd July 1942 we were evacuated. We left for Siberia. At all large railway stations they arranged meals for citizens of Leningrad. In Vologda, when I came back to our car with dinner, I didn't find my sister. It turned out that she was taken off the train by hospital attendants: she was sleeping and they counted her for dead. Here take into consideration that they counted her for dead after two months of her stay in hospital. So you can imagine what she had looked like in May! I ran to the hospital and saw my sister lying in bed: by that time they had made sure that she was alive. I hardly managed to jump into the car and continued my way alone. Two months later my sister came to me: Siberia, Novosibirsk region, Maslyanino village [150 km north-west of Novosibirsk]. All evacuated people were gathered at the school, where the village inhabitants came to choose lodgers.

I don't want to speak about evacuation, though it was the evacuation that saved our lives. I'd like to mention only the following: there I learned how to chop firewood, how to burn wood in a stove and to grow vegetables.

We returned to Leningrad in October 1945. I won't describe the city: much was written about it. We were absolutely alone: no relatives remained alive. Even all our neighbors died. Nobody waited for

us, nobody was happy to see us. We couldn't return to our room, because it was occupied by a returned front-line soldier: such people had priority of lodging. And people, who survived the blockade, were considered not to be war victims for a long time. I think that it is one of the crimes committed by the Communist State.

Nevertheless we called for some things of ours. I took down our chandelier, took plates and dishes and also our beds. We went to live with a person we got acquainted with in evacuation. Later I found my prewar friend, and we moved in with her.

It was necessary to begin life anew. I was the elder and felt responsible for my sister. My first post-war work was in the Pharmaceutical College. The director of the college offered me to enter the college, but I had to earn money for myself and my sister. And my sister entered the Pharmaceutical Technical School. She was housed in a hostel. After the end of her education she left for Priozersk to work. There she got a room. As for me, I had no place of my own for 14 years. I got my first room in a communal apartment in 1959. And in my present apartment I've lived since 1976. It is the second self-contained apartment in my life – the first one was in Berlin.

Sometimes I try to remember my political views of that time. I remember for sure that I created no illusions for myself regarding the Soviet regime. I never was a Communist Party member. It seems to me that at that time my life was so hard that I had neither the time, nor the strength to think about something of no relation to my everyday troubles. You see, we were poor and homeless. I remember neither anybody's departure to the West or to Israel, nor conversations on such themes.

In 1948 I started work at the Krasnogvardeets factory, manufacturing medical devices. There I worked till 1980, when I retired. And again I was lucky with people. You know, after the end of the war, anti-Semitic campaigns [20](#) were launched by state authorities, and a lot of people suffered from it. But at the Krasnoarmeets factory Georgy Moudanov was the director. He was Armenian and employed Jews, when already nobody did it. He also refused to fire employees because of their nationality. One day they summoned him to the regional Communist Party Committee and said that at his factory the percentage of Jews among the employees was too high. [The regional Communist Party Committee held the key of the Communist Party activities in the region] The director answered that he would prefer to be thrown out of the Party rather than fulfill their requirements. Among the citizens his factory had the reputation of an institution where they gave jobs.

In 1955 I entered the Financial and Economic College – by correspondence – and graduated from it in 1959. That year was very remarkable for me: I got both a room and a higher education diploma.

At my work I never came into conflicts on the ground of my Jewish origin. When entering the college, I also faced no discrimination. Most probably it happened because I wanted only to become a correspondence course student. And one more thing: the College of Finance and Economic, which at present has a very high rating, was not in popular demand at that time.

Fortunately I was never forced to condemn Israel or the USA publicly. At first I worked as a bookkeeper, then as a senior bookkeeper, and later as an economist. I was not a person in a high position and never aimed at it. I was considered to be a good specialist, and always had a good reputation. I always worked honestly and with pleasure, but retired on a pension easily. If I'd wanted I could have continued working, nobody turned me out. But my second husband had a

house in Frunze, and it was hard for him to sell it. [Frunze – present-day Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan] And it took almost three days and nights to get there by train – while it was too expensive to go by airplane. So we lived in two cities: Aron Semenovitch [Leveter] used to live at my place in winter, and I lived at his in summer. While I worked, I had to take leave at my own expense, and when I became a pensioner I depended on nobody and lived at his for half a year. In 1982 he sold his house at last and moved to my place.

I was never interested in the nationality of my friends; it was of no importance to me. Regarding the percentage of Jews among my friends I not only can say nothing, but also consider it impossible to make this sort of calculation from an ethical point of view. Look, is it worthy to apply mathematical formula to people, who were dear to me and for the most part are not alive at present? Of course not!

But it was only possible for me to marry a Jew. My father used to say: 'Be sure that all members of our family are of the same nationality. Friends – that's a horse of a different color, but the family should be Jewish. Otherwise you would live with him for 20 years, and then he would apply to you the rude epithet: dirty Jew.'

I was married twice. My first husband, Anatoliy Borisovich Kanevsky, was born in 1920 in Petrograd [today St. Petersburg]. He was an interpreter – English and German languages. We got acquainted in a recreation house and lived together for four years. It appeared that we were very different, but we parted as friends. We didn't keep in touch afterwards. He died in 1992.

My second husband was Aron Semenovitch Leveter. He was born on 23rd February 1915 in Riga [today capital of Latvia] and died on 20th March 2003 in St. Petersburg. His father was a Bolshevik [21](#) and perished during the Civil War [22](#). My husband didn't remember him. In their family there were two children: my husband and his elder sister Riva. His mother moved to Velizh of Smolensk region together with her children. It happened in 1917 or 1918. His mother started working at a siccative factory, where they dried vegetables and fruit. In the Russian provinces there were a lot of such factories.

The director of the factory felt sorry for the poor widow with two children and did his best to help her, basically with production of his enterprise. They lived in real poverty. Their life became a little bit better, when Aron finished a technical school and started working as an operator at a factory. Unfortunately I can remember neither the exact name of the technical school, nor the factory. He told me that he was very much afraid of fire: the factory building and most of the equipment were wooden. He was even more afraid to be accused of sabotage. [According to the Soviet criminal law, sabotage was considered to be an especially dangerous crime which aimed to do much harm to the state.

During the years of Stalin terror false and absurd accusations of sabotage were common.] Because of this reason and also because operators had crummy salaries, Aron changed his profession to that of a driver.

I was the second wife of Aron Semenovitch. Before the war broke out he was married to Maria Berova. She gave birth to their daughter. Aron went to the front immediately after the war broke out. When the Germans approached Velizh, my husband's mother, his sister and his first wife with their little daughter in her arms left their native town on foot. But the mother returned, she said

she would be waiting for her son at home. But she didn't manage to meet her son there: together with other Jews of Velizh she was put into a shed and burnt alive on 29th January 1942.

I'd like to tell you the story of what happened to my husband and his first wife. When you read something of this kind in a published novel, you think that the author's imagination ran away with him. But everything I am going to tell now, did indeed happen.

Maria and Riva – Aron's sister – found themselves in evacuation in different places. Maria was in Frunze, and Riva in Kazan. Aron's wife received his two death certificates. The authorities fixed a pension for their child. Aron also searched for her, but he hadn't the remotest chance of success to find her alive: he knew that their native town was razed to the ground. Aron got demobilized only in 1946 after the end of the war with Japan [23](#). Then he went to Kazan to see his only sister. She tried to persuade her brother to stay in Kazan. But he didn't like it there, and he left for Riga. Soon he took his sister to Riga too. He started working as a driver. His sister taught English language at the Academy of Civil Aviation.

Everybody around him urged Aron to marry: you see, after the end of the war there were so many lonely women. But something constantly kept him from it. One day he went to a cinema together with Riva. Before the performance they showed a news-reel. The credit titles contained an inscription 'The camera-man M. Berov, Minsk.' And Berov was the surname of the brother of my future husband's first wife. Aron went to Minsk. He got to know the address of Mikhail Semenovich, went to his place and found all his family there. They said: 'Your Maria is alive and your daughter will go to school this year.' Aron returned to Riga, and they sent a telegram to Frunze to inform them about their arrival. He went to Frunze together with his sister.

At that very moment, when they entered the apartment, a postman brought the pension, which the girl received for her lost father. The first words Aron said to his newfound family were the following: 'No money, I am alive.' His wife refused to return to Riga. She remembered the horrors of war forever and thought that a new war could come again from the west. Aron remained in Frunze and worked as a driver as best as he could: he wanted to earn money for the construction of a house. Later he changed his work and became a mechanic. He always read very much and was an educated person. Maria died in 1974.

I got acquainted with Aron Semenovich in 1977. We both were lonely; it was my friend who introduced us to each other. We got married in 1979. I had children neither of the first bed, nor of the second.

Aron Semenovich was at the front during the war. He was a driver of a Katyusha rocket launcher. [Katyusha was an informal name of the Soviet rocket launchers which played a very important role during military operations in 1941-1945.] The tragedy in Velizh, when all Jews there were burnt alive, happened in his absence. And in Velizh there were a lot of Jews, you could say Velizh was a Jewish shtetl.

On the place of that tragedy a standard obelisk was erected. In connection with it I'd like to tell you about a remarkable person: Alexander Grigoryevich Bourdukov. He was born in Velizh and at present works there as a teacher of history. During the war he was a boy and lost his hand, having set off a mine. The Fascists committed atrocities practically before his eyes. I consider him to be a near saint. He did his best to preserve the memory of Jews tormented to death in his native land

during the war, it was his lifework. You see, under the Communists, the Soviet authorities didn't speak about the Holocaust loudly. It was considered a demonstration of dissidence. And for many years Alexander Grigoryevich collected pieces of information about those who'd perished or survived, about the history of the ghetto.

We got acquainted with him in 1987, when I came to Velizh. One large room in his house was filled with card files. It was his diligence that helped to erect a new good monument at the spot, where Jews were burnt alive. There is also a museum, where a photo of my husband with all his war decorations hangs, among others. They especially asked my husband to have his photo taken with all his orders and medals – not medal ribbons.

I didn't manage to bury my husband at the Jewish cemetery. I am the last one in our family, there are no descendants... I had to cremate my husband's body and place the cinerary urn in the columbarium to minimize someone's efforts in keeping the place of his repose in order. I hope that nobody will take a grave view of my behavior. It seems to me that the most important thing was that we agreed on it while he was alive. The regional military registration and enlistment office helped me very much to arrange everything for his funeral.

I don't know where my parents and my brother were buried, but I'm sure that it wasn't at a Jewish cemetery.

After the end of the war we didn't observe traditions, didn't celebrate Jewish holidays. Sometimes my sister and I went to the synagogue, but it happened extremely rarely.

Among my friends there always were both Jews and Russians. And I always could speak to my friends about what I pleased. Naturally we spoke both about Israel and Judaism. Do you really need to have friends, if you can't speak to them about your worries and interests?

I can cook very well: it's my mother's training in me. Until now I am able to make every dish of the Jewish cuisine. Unfortunately at present I have nobody to do my best for.

I was on a guided tour in Czechoslovakia and Hungary and in the German Democratic Republic at the invitation of my acquaintance. The first time when I was going to visit Germany, in 1986, it was denied to me. I broke china in the local Visa Department. [Visa Departments in the USSR were responsible for visa processing, but most often they refused to give authorization to Soviet people to go abroad.] I shouted at them: 'You permit yourselves to go to your native villages and embrace your beloved birches, and why is it denied to me to visit the place, where I spent my childhood?' Certainly they didn't change their mind, but I enjoyed every minute of our talk.

Israel's victories in the wars of 1967 [24](#) and 1973 [25](#) were of great importance to me. All my life I was interested in the history of Jewish people and always wished Jews to have their own state. I had friends who lived in Palestine in the period when Israel as a State was far from existence. Later they moved to the USSR. So they told us that the Arabs permanently attacked peaceful Jewish agricultural settlements. Therefore my sympathies were with Jews not only because of the call of my Jewish heart. We were happy when Israel gained its great victories. At the factory there was my coworker who was called up for active service and participated in the war of 1967 on the side of the Arabs. He told me: 'Zenta Iosefovna, our war equipment was damaged, scrapped. We have to learn to fight war from Jews.'

I didn't visit Israel till 1989, but regularly corresponded with my sister's family and it was no trouble to me [26](#). We had no relatives in western countries. I also had no problems at work because of my nationality. But I'd like to emphasize that I was lucky. The anti-Semitic campaign triggered off by the state authorities was in great force.

I was very much pleased about the fall of the Berlin Wall. [The Berlin Wall was erected in 1961 to separate Western and Eastern parts of Berlin in Germany. It was demolished in 1989.] You will agree with me that it was clearly wrong, that a far-fetched idea divided a country and its people. And I was always indifferent to Germany and German people. I already told you that I never equaled Fascists with Germans.

When perestroika [27](#) was initiated in this country, we felt hopeful for the future. Now I think that it answered our expectations in many respects. And in spite of the fact that much in our life pains me today, the possible revival of Fascism frightens me most of all. I don't want to have the past returned. Lord forbid!

I always identified myself as a Jewess. I was always interested in everything connected with Jewry. Before now we had to grope about for such information. Certainly at present there are more printed papers, more newspapers. All this pleases me very much.

I am connected to the activities of the St. Petersburg Jewish community through the Hesed Welfare Center [28](#). Once a fortnight they bring me from my home to the Hesed Daytime Center by car. [The Daytime Center is one of the programs of Hesed.] I spend all the day there. We have breakfast and dinner, but the most important thing is that we mix with each other. They arrange for us lectures and concerts in Hesed, we also go on very interesting excursions: we saw the Amber Chamber [The Amber Chamber is famous for its amber decorations. During World War II it was stolen by the Fascists and disappeared without a trace. In 1979 in St. Petersburg they started its reconstruction, and in 2003 the Amber Room was opened for visitors] in Catherine Palace in Pushkin [erected by the architect Rastrelli [29](#) in 1752-1756], soon they will take us to the recently opened exhibition of Chagall paintings [30](#). He was banned in the USSR. Earlier I received large food packages, and now it happens extremely rarely, and the number of enclosed items has decreased. One day they gave me a package with the most necessary medicines. I got financial assistance neither from Germany, nor from Switzerland.

I remember the day of Stalin's death very well [5th May 1953]. At work they forced everybody to come to a meeting. Guys – idiots! – were crying! I spent some time watching them and then marched off in disgust. I can't say that I was glad: you could always anticipate aggravation of the situation, but I didn't feel pity for him at all.

When they organized the Doctors' Plot [31](#) we were filled with horror. Once I went somewhere by bus, and a man there damned Jews using such dirty words! It was really terrible! The situation smelled of pogrom. As far as events in Hungary [32](#), Czechoslovakia [33](#), and later in Afghanistan [34](#) are concerned, I never trusted any word of Soviet propaganda.

After the loss of Aron Semenovitch my life became very lonely. I take refuge from it in reading: I read very much. My visits to the Hesed Center also help me. Now I don't understand the word vacation. Where can I go alone? When my husband was alive we often went to different resorts, most often to Baltic Republics.

- **Glossary:**

1 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.

2 Blockade of Leningrad

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade

3 Galicia

The Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, or simply Galicia, was the largest and northernmost province of Austria from 1772 until 1918, with Lemberg (Lwow) as its capital. It was created from territories taken during the partitions of Poland and lasted until the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Its main activity was agriculture, with some processing industry and mining, and the standard of living was proverbially low. Today it is a historical region split between Poland and the Ukraine. Its population in 1910 was 8,0258,700 of which 58% was Polish, 40% Ruthenian, 1% German and 10% other, or according to religion: Roman Catholic 46%, Eastern Orthodox 42%, Jewish 11%, the remaining 1% Protestant and other. Galicia was the center of the branch of Orthodox Judaism known as Hasidism. Nearly all the Jews in Galicia perished during WWII.

4 Hasidism (Hasidic)

Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

5 Sephardi Jewry

Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

6 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.

7 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934

8 St

George Cross: Established in Russia in 1769 for distinguished military merits of officers and generals, and, from 1807, of soldiers and corporals. Until 1913 it was officially referred to as Distinction Military Order, from 1913 as St. George Cross. Servicemen awarded with St. George Crosses of all four degrees were called St. George Cavaliers

9 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

10 Gertzen (sometimes spelled Herzen), Alexander I

(1812-1870): Russian revolutionary, writer and philosopher.

11 Ispolkom

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic

procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

12 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

13 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry.

14 All-Union pioneer organization

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

15 Dacha

country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

16 Recreation Centers in the USSR

trade unions of many enterprises and public organizations in the USSR constructed recreation centers, rest homes, and children's health improvement centers, where employees could take a vacation paying 10 percent of the actual total cost of such stays. In theory each employee could take one such vacation per year, but in reality there were no sufficient numbers of vouchers for such vacations, and they were mostly available only for the management.

17 Akhmatova, Anna (pen name of Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, 1888-1966)

Russian poet, whose first book, Evening (1912), won her attention from Russian readers for its beautiful love lyrics. Akhmatova became a member of the Acmeist literary group in the same year and her second volume of poems, Rosary (1914) made her one of the most popular poetesses of

her time. After 1922 it became difficult for her to publish as the Soviet government disapproved of her apolitical themes, love lyrics and religious motif. In 1946 she was the subject of harsh attacks by the Soviet cultural authorities once again, and she was only able to publish again under Khrushchev's regime.

18 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

19 Molotov, V

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

20 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'.

21 Bolsheviks

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16 April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevikize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order

to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

22 Civil War (1918-1920)

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

23 War with Japan

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

24 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

25 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.

26 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.

27 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician

Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

28 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.

29 Rastrelli, Bartolomeo (1700-1771)

Court architect of Italian birth of Russian empress Elizabeth. Most of his buildings are in Saint Petersburg: the Smolny Monastery, the Summer Palace, the Winter Palace, the Hermitage, and other buildings. He also headed the construction of the Tsarskoe Selo residence.

30 Chagall, Marc (1889-1985)

Russian-born French (Jewish) painter. Since Marc Chagall survived two world wars and the Revolution of 1917 he increasingly introduced social and religious elements into his art.

31 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

32 1956

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started

in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

33 Prague Spring

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

34 Afghanistan war

Conflict between anti-Communist Muslim Afghan guerrillas and the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops. The conflict started by the coup d'état of the Marxist-Leninist People's Democratic Party and the establishment of a pro-Soviet Communist government. In 1979 another coup provoked an invasion by the Soviet forces and the installation of Babrak Karmal as president. The Soviet invasion sparked off Afghan resistance; the guerillas received aid from the USA, China, and Saudi Arabia. Although the USSR had superior weapons, the rebels successfully eluded them. The conflict largely settled into a stalemate, with Soviet and government forces controlling the urban areas, and the guerrillas operating fairly freely in mountainous rural regions. Soviet citizens became increasingly discontented with the war, which dragged on without success but with continuing casualties. By the end of the war 15,000 Soviet soldiers were killed and 37,000 wounded. The Soviet troops pulled out in 1989 leaving the country with severe political, economic, and ecological problems.