

# David Levin

*David Zakharovitch Levin is a non-tall, strong man, who keeps in his seventy nine being cheerful and full of energy. Most of his life he was a naval officer and his military origins are displayed in everything.*

*In opposite to many retired of his age he is still working and says that he gets the same pleasure from his work and help to human beings as many years ago. He considers himself an optimist, and that is true.*

*He is very interested in history of his family, completes the genealogical albums, keeps his parents' heritage, on the walls of his cozy apartment there hang not only the usual family photos, but also the wedding gifts of his mother, and the bookshelves are full of his father's books.*



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## My Grandparent's background

I don't know where from are my great grandmothers and great grandfathers. History of their lives is unknown. I don't know where they were born, or what they were, but I think that father's ancestors lived in the borough.

My grandfather – David Levin – was born in 1862 and died in 1917. My father even had a ring, made out of gold and platinum, where the date of his father's death was written. I keep this ring too. They lived in Dvinsk [today Daugavpils, town in Latvia], but they moved there from Slonim [town in Grodno province], father considered that he was born in Slonim. Probably, grandfather was religious. I make this conclusion due to that fact that his sons were religious people.

Father said that granddad had a good character. They spoke Yiddish in family. That was quite usual large Jewish family with plenty of children. I remember that somebody from my father's side made vinegar. It means that he was some kind of owner, or businessman. Perhaps, they had their own house and some small economy.

During World War I grandfather went to ask to demobilize my father from the army, and due to the unknown reason, has got heart fit. He was fifty five approximately; today he would be considered not an old man, not at all. He died on his way, on the street, we don't know where exactly. However, I know the following: he had some money, which he supposed to pay to let my father out of the army. And when he fell down, he pointed to his chest. They were some Jews around, and one of them took this money away. And my father told that Jewish community of this settlement blamed him.

About grandmother – Frieda Levina [nee Shatkes] – I know nothing. The only thing I know that she died in 1930. And I understood that it happened in Latvia. When we've been to America, they showed us the genealogy of whole family, and the dates of grandmother's and grandfather's deaths. However, even my American relatives didn't find the date of her birth. Both in America and in Israel we saw the family photo of Levin family, we don't have such one. On this picture all brothers stand, everyone is seen well. I found grandmother's photo too.

Parents of my mother – that is Vitebsk [town in Belarus, center of Jewish life]. They are viteblyans, or inhabitants of Vitebsk. Father of my mother (I don't know exactly date of his birth), Sergey, or Shmera in Jewish, that's why my mother was Slava Sergeevna, or Shmerovna. Approximately in 1939, when I was fourteen or fifteen, I've been to Vitebsk and saw my grandfather. He had paralyses. I remember the large room, Granddad sits on the chair, numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren, including me, run around. To my opinion, he died in 1940. My father called my grandmother (mother of my mother) Lesya-Ghuta, but I think she was called Lesya Meerson. She lived in Vitebsk too, later she came to visit to Leningrad, and we communicated more than with granddad.

I remember that grandmother was kind and nice, but I didn't have long conversations to her as far as she had so many things to do. She had many children. There was a big family in Vitebsk, and many pals and friends. I can recall where they lived. If you arrived to Vitebsk, and walk a bit across the railway street, in four hundred meters to the right you see the Russian Orthodox Church, and if you turned to the left, there was a street, I don't remember its name, maybe, something like Station road, where house of my grandparents stood. Granny, Granddad, brother of my mother, called Boris (I've got to know him in 1939), they all lived there.

It was a big one-stage house of their own with a large courtyard. There were many rooms, big kitchen, big dining-room, and that room, where grandfather sat, not moving, was the very large one. They had three or four rooms in total and that extra-building, where Boris and his family lived.

I don't think they had water pipe. There was a water street fountain and, perhaps, there was electricity too. Anyway, Vitebsk was a big town, and they lived not far from the station. In 1930s they certainly had electricity at home. Apparently, the house stood almost as an angle. There were no animals and pets, neither garden. They didn't work in the field of agriculture.

Grandfather and grandmother didn't have any special education, in the best occasion they studied at the local school or in cheder. I don't know if they were born in Vitebsk or not, but I remember that Granny had a brother, called Udel. He lived in Vitebsk and I saw him either. I remember him very well, because he sweated always, and came all wet. I don't know what he did. Perhaps, grandmother had some more brothers and sisters, but I can't recall anything about them. Shame on me, but I don't know any of my grandfather's relatives.

Certainly, my grandmother was a housewife. I remember well her bread, which she used to bake in the Russian Stove [1](#). That was large bread, fried; I still remember its smell and taste. And I don't know what was grandfather's business, what he was, maybe a craftsman?

The family was friendly, and there were many guests in the house. I know that half of the town came to visit. Mother got to know Chagall [2](#), he also came to visit. She told me that she saw him personally, not once, but from time to time. But she never told me the details, and I didn't ask her. However, I think there were not very close, otherwise she would tell us the stories about such famous person. I think those meetings could take place in the beginning of 1910s, when my mother was a young and attractive woman.

I suppose that their guests were mainly Jews. There was big Jewish community in Vitebsk. Jewish youth came too, as far as my grandparents had many daughters, and that is always the huge attractive force. Obviously, Granddad had some authority; I know from conversations and even more from my father's memories (he told me about Vitebsk more than my mother), that they communicated to some public prosecutor. Even after the [Russian] Revolution [3](#) they had some pals and later father met them in Leningrad. Somebody took a good position here. As I understood, all they were arrested and banished. So those people were not the ordinary shtetl inhabitants.

As a matter of fact my mother's family was a real Jewish family, which observed all main Jewish traditions and rules. You can see it, if you compared Jewish names of their children. They observed Sabbath and celebrated the holidays. But I didn't participate in it. Being a child, I wasn't very keen of such things.

The only Jewish thing I remember is that grandmother baked matzah. The economy was a big one, so they made everything themselves, using their own opportunities. I can say even more: my mother could prepare Jewish meals, Jewish cookies, and I don't mention my grandmother, because she was doing the same for sure. Anyway, Lesya, my grandmother taught her children to keep the house and observe Jewish traditions. All her children had their own businesses at home, all they kept the house.

Naturally, parents of my mother knew Yiddish well, they spoke it. I insist that their mother tongue was Yiddish. However, Granny knew Russian too. She talked to children both Yiddish and Russian, but mainly in Yiddish. I didn't talk to grandfather on any language because he had paralyses.

Granddad had a beard. Grandmother didn't put on the sheitl; she had wonderful hair of her own. She wore the dress, and, naturally wore the kerchief. I don't remember of which color, but she had it on all the time. I can't say what they thought about the soviet power, we didn't even have such conversations.

## My father's and mother's background

My father, Zakhar Davidovitch, was born in 1896 and died in 1967. Apparently, my father's family lived in Daugavpils, or Dvinsk, which is in Latvia. Father after the [Russian] Revolution, when Latvia and Lithuania became the independent states, didn't see them and knew nothing about them till late 1940s.

Father was the youngest in his family. And when they had to decide what to do, the elder brother, I don't remember his name, said: 'He finished four grades, that's enough'. I don't know what that was: cheder or something different. And he couldn't forgive his elder brother that entire story.

My father served in the Tsar Army during the World War I. Father told me that he happened to get into the gas attack and he was demobilized after that. After the war he found himself in Vitebsk, and they got to know each other with my mother. Perhaps, he came to visit for some occasion. And around 1920 they got married. I don't know if they proposed father to my mother. Probably, that was a big Jewish wedding. There were plenty of gifts; I even keep some of them. I suppose that those are very expensive things (two china plates with decorations on the animal themes and a big Japanese panel). They gave them those things for the wedding, mother gave them to me and I hope to give them to my daughter.

When father was yet in Vitebsk, the NEP [4](#) had begun, and he went often to neighborhood areas as a commercial traveler. He worked for the private firm, which made wrappers for sweets. I even saw that album with those wrappers. He traveled with this album and signed the agreements. Probably, that could continue for ages, but then 1928 came [it was officially required to close NEP, and nepmen were arrested and put to jail], his owner happened to be a clever person and closed her business just in time. It seems to me, that he had no more job and left to Leningrad.

Father had a pal, who has got some good position in future. And that viteblyanin advised him to go to Leningrad and promised him a room, if he worked here for a while. When father has got a room, he lived there for couple months and then invited mother to come.

In Leningrad on Moika [embankment of Moika River – one of the rivers in the very center of the city] there was an artel, and he found there a job of machine operator. He was big and left-handed, and there was such a machine, which had to be revolved to the certain direction, and nobody, except him, couldn't afford it. He showed me this place, and I saw the way he worked. Later he was a driver, worked in the subsidiary department of the Academy of Arts. His head was Gerasimov, and his brother was cinema director, famous Sergey Gerasimov [5](#), who came and got paid, even he didn't do anything there. Then father worked on the factory named after Stalin, near Finland railway station [station, where trains to Finland and some part of Leningrad region depart from]. That was a huge factory, it had his own football team, and today it's called 'Zenith' [the best football team in whole city, in 1984 won the USSR championship, usually plays in the Premier league]. Father worked in the subsidiary department of the factory for a long while.

Father always paid great attention to the self-education. He studied at the English language courses, read a lot. When I was employed in the Military Naval Institute, I took books in our library (we had the very good one) and brought them to my father, I also brought all the magazines, all the novelties. Once per week we met, and I brought a new book. He was in the center of all events,

had wide views, and had a wish to know everything.

Father was an intellectual, wrote a book of war memories, and later he gave this diary to the Museum of Leningrad history. We have at home some notes, where he called himself Rudnitsky. He wasn't a professional writer and was too shy to write from his own name, so he chose a nickname and wrote his blockade diaries, using this nickname. I don't think he knew somebody, called Rudnitsky, perhaps, he just liked this family name. Those are real memoirs of the participant of Leningrad Blockade [6](#).

He had a good voice, he liked to sing, and he even bought a guitar to take music lessons and learn how to play, but never did that, and the guitar stayed to hang on the wall. He could play some very easy songs on the piano, especially he liked 'To the position a girl...' [The first line of the famous song by M. Isakovsky about the Great Patriotic War [7](#), he sang military songs with great pleasure.

It is nothing to tell about my mother, she always worked a lot, being a cashier and earning money. She was called Slava otherwise she would be Lesya, Ghuta or something else in her documents. Anyway, she was Shmerovna, and in documents it was written 'Sergeevna', and all her sisters were 'Sergeevna's.

My mother was the main helper of grandfather and grandmother till 1928, in that period of time when she lived in Vitebsk. My father copied the way Granny Lesya said: 'Slava, go here, Slava, go there'. Mother was working harder, then others. However, she finished the Gymnasium with Silver medal; her family could afford such an education.

## Growing up

I was born in 1924 in Vitebsk, and when I was three or four years old, we moved to Leningrad. When I was born, my parents rented a separate apartment in Vitebsk. They called the owner as a 'shakhmeister'; I don't know why, maybe, this was Yiddish word for 'owner'? We lived just near the Russian Orthodox Church. And I remember that I was going to the kindergarten.

In 1928 father moved from Vitebsk to Leningrad, and in half a year we, I and my mother, followed him. Since that time I consider Leningrad my native city. We lived on the Gogol [8](#) (today Malaya Morskaya) street. In that shared apartment [9](#), in one room, we lived for almost all our life.

Naturally, we went from Vitebsk to Leningrad by train. But what I remember exactly from my three or four years is how we arrived to Leningrad, to Vitebsky railway station. Father rented the carrier, and we went in that cab. And what I recalled for whole my life, till today is that when you go on Gorokhovaya street, previously Dzerzhinsky street, and cross Griboedov channel [one of the main channels of the city, is called after poet and diplomat], the bridge goes straight down, so I remember this bridge very well. I recalled that feeling when suddenly I went up, and nowadays often when I go there, I recall that.

In Leningrad we lived very poor. My parents worked very much, especially mother. She was a cashier in Leningrad House of Selling for a long while, and also she's been working for Torgsin [10](#). Those Torgsin stores were organized in middle 1920s when the Soviet authorities decided to take out gold, silver and jewelry, but legally, not due to repressions, so people came and got food

instead of their gold. Mother worked there, and that was a great support. In those times it was nothing to eat, there was a few of food in whole country. There were no rich people, and if somebody was richer than others, he hid his treasures. And in Torgsin they gave ratios, and that was a big business. The ratio included the piece of sausage, the piece of cheese, some butter, and some sugar. That was a holiday to get a ratio. I know all that because I helped my mother to carry the packages. All Torgsin employees got ratios in the boxes. That was such help! Later mother worked in the famous shoe store on Nevsky Avenue, 11, between streets of Gogol and Gertzen [11](#). And in front of it there was a 'Death to husbands' – the stockinet store [famous city shop].

Parents had good relations. Probably, there were some scandals, but they lived friendly, and they lived together for almost fifty years.

My mother's and father's mother tongue was Yiddish. But mainly they spoke Russian to each other. To tell the truth, if they and their relatives didn't want us, the children, to understand what they were talking about, they spoke Yiddish. Like that: they spoke Russian, then suddenly put some Yiddish words, and that meant that they said something, forbidden for little children. And they talked to mother's brothers and sisters both Russian and Yiddish.

Mother (there were quite a few children both in family of my mother and of my father, as usually in Jewish families before the [Russian] Revolution) had seven brothers and sisters. Step by step, beginning since 1928, they moved to Leningrad. Soon almost all relatives of my mother came here: brother Naum together with his family, brother Isaac, sister Zinaida, and sister Bertha. In Vitebsk Boris, sister Frada, sister Emma stayed, and one more brother died earlier, to my opinion.

We communicated to mother's relatives a lot. I saw my cousins every week, especially Efim and Zalman, the sons of aunt Bertha. There was also Zinovy, the son of Isaak, mother's brother. Often we celebrated holidays, all mother's brothers and sisters came to visit. Brother Naum, when drunk a little, began to argue to his wife, and everyone about that. In one room they placed about twenty or thirty people, a crowd of kids, it was very funny. Grandmother came to Leningrad too: hosted at one daughter, then at another one, and later she left for Vitebsk.

I remember that I was always happy to see uncle Naum, because he always brought three rubles to the child. That was a big event. And if I had money, I went to the Writer's corner [popular soviet bookstore in the center of the city], placed on Nevsky Avenue, and bought books.

We went to Vitebsk together with my cousins, sons of mother's sister Bertha. That was during the summer, we went to Letsy [small village near Vitebsk], to dacha [cottage], that uncle Boris rented. He had two sons too, called Mikhail and Efim. Boris worked on a moving machine with films, so-called cinema 'peredvigka' [the car or track with movies, traveling throughout the country]. He wasn't a head, he was some kind of operator, or dispatcher, and directed those cars to all corners. Efim was doctor's assistant during World War II, and Mikhail was too little, so he didn't serve in the Army. They all survived, and Boris died later, after the War. His sons immigrated to America, first Mikhail, and then Efim. I think they both are alive, but I don't keep in touch with them.

Other brothers, Isaac and Naum, who lived in Leningrad were civil servants both, they didn't get any special education, I think. Isaac was married to Eugenia, she was Jewish, and they had a son, called Zinovy, who was an active Komsomol leader, he was on the front and then he became a



geologist. Perhaps, his mother was geologist either, I don't know exactly. Finally Zinovy moved to America and died their one or two years ago. Naum had a wife, called Lubov, she was Jewish too, and she's been civil servant, just like her husband. They gave birth to two daughters: Lilia graduated from an Institute in Leningrad and worked as engineer, and Anna was a cashier. I remember her working in the bookstore not far from us, on Moscovsky Avenue.

Mother's sister Zinaida was a librarian and worked in a library her entire life. She had a son, called Genrich, he was married to a Jewish girl with high education. When he studied at the Institute, he's got sick, and instead of that our doctors gave some medicine, he died. He was twenty eight, I think. He is buried in Jewish cemetery. Mother's sister Bertha was a civil servant, but after the World War II she was retired and lived on the pension, which she's got after her son's death, who was killed on the front. Frada was a bookkeeper and she was involved in coal industry. And Emma was killed in Latvia during the World War II together with her son, they lived near Riga, in Meguapark [neighborhoods of Riga], and she was quite rich person, I think, because they had their own house, they even sent us its photos.

I consider that in 1930s in Vitebsk they lived a bit better than in Leningrad. They had more food and more freedom. I mean that my parents had to work hard, and in Belarus they had some jobs, taking less time. For example, uncle Boris had some official job, but still he had some free time to find something cheaper, to go to the market. We never went to the market. And they had there comparably cheap market, in Belarus everything was cheaper.

Father suffered very strong that he couldn't communicate with his relatives. He had many brothers and one sister. Their names were: Haim, Yacob, Udel, Itsik, and I don't remember the name of his sister. In 1934, when Latvia turned to become fascist, Itsik moved to America.

Meeting with this brother, whom he loved and appreciated, never happened. Haim was considered a wise man, but the cleverest one was Itsik, he even got to know Albert Einstein. Father's brother Jacob was busy in some religious activities at Latvia, in Daugavpils. I think it happened both when Latvia was independent (I mean 1930s) and after it became a part of the USSR (1940s-1950s). He went to the synagogue, to my opinion he even was its senior. Later, in late 1950s they repatriated for Israel. He had a daughter Esther; we communicated with her in those times and continue to write to her now. Thanks to God, she is still alive. And when we've been to Israel, we've been to her. She lives in outskirts of Tel-Aviv. Haim was a bookkeeper; he was working for some firm or company. But when I first met him, he was retired already. And also I have his photo, maybe, pre-revolution one: he wears a good suit; he sits in a good cabinet. Anyway, he was some kind of economist.

Father's elder brother, whose name I can't recall all those days, (father never forgave him for that story with education, that story, which I told above) lived in Sverdlovsk [big city in Ural, named after soviet Bolshevik, today Yekaterinburg] and died there. I never met him. However, I've got to know his children, and his son Benjamin even followed in my own footsteps, graduated from Military College, and while he studied in Leningrad, he came to visit often. I was an officer and went to the college to meet him. He had a sister, I don't remember her name.

Unfortunately, I can't tell more about my father's siblings because first they lived abroad in another country, then some of them died (for example, Udel and his son were murdered by fascists), and

finally I met only a few of them. So I don't have any additional information about my uncles and aunts or their children.

Mother was very relative person; her origins come from the very friendly family. And later, when I met father's relatives too, they seemed to be very nice, very kind, very honest people. I can prove that for sure. Father was a friend not only of mother's relatives. Sometimes he was tired of them; he said that he was full of them. But as a matter of fact he was very company person.

In our shared apartment Fedosia Yacovlevna (she was Jewish either), who, as a matter of fact, actually grew me up, lived in one of the rooms. Her daughter Olga Markovna, music teacher and husband of her Anatoly Yacovlevitch Vol, an artist, lived in another room, they had no children, and the neighbor liked me very much, I was instead of her grandchild. She studied with me a lot, brought tasty things, and when summer period had begun, she came to my parents and said: 'When we are going to leave for dacha?' and many years ahead we went to Sestroretsk [town near Leningrad, the spa place]. So neighbor did more for my education than my mother, who was always busy.

Another neighbor was Elizabeth Vladimirovna; I remember that she had an angry dachshund. Later she's got married and moved from our apartment, it happened before the World War II. We had good relations with our neighbors. Everything was all right.

Sometimes parents went for holidays. Father, I know, had been to Berdyansk [port town on the bank of Azov Sea], to my opinion, that happened in 1939; they gave him a voucher on the factory (Stalin factory was quite a rich one). Mainly, the parents went for holidays separately, I think. Mother relaxed together with her sisters. And when I've been to dacha, father came every week to see me and Fedosya Yacovlevna. I went to the station, met him, he always brought some food. However, I guess that they didn't have plenty of vacations or holidays.

That school, where I studied at, later became the very famous one. That was school number two hundred thirty nine, mixed, both for girls and boys. It was situated on Isaac's square [one of the central city squares, where Isaac's cathedral and Mariinsky Palace are situated], on that place, where you can see that building with lions. Half of my school friends were Jewish, and half were Russians. Nowadays my best friend Victor Isaev is my childhood friend; we were friends from the very first grade. Also there was Phroya Shlyyak, a Jew, he lives in Germany now, and also we were friends with Admiral Andrey Victorovitch Peterson. I had many friends.

Besides, I grew among the real hooligans, bandits, court boys. It was so funny to be with them. Naturally, they didn't kill or murder, but they were thieving, and I tried to stop them from doing this. But, not looking at that fact that they were hooligans in the real meaning of this word, they never touched me with a finger. Never. Nobody. I'm very surprised with it. And I must say that even though I could suffer from some anti-Semitism, but I don't remember any story.

I was keen on sports, liked our sport teacher Dmitry Sergeevitch. I loved volleyball, went to play volleyball after the school very often. And went to the football too, watched how basks [football team from Spain] played when they came. Apparently, we all days long played football in front of the school, just near Isaac's cathedral. So we had the very usual boys' hobbies.



I painted, even began to paint with oil. A boy who studied together with me, became a President of Academy Arts, I forgot his name. We sat together in one class, and met in many years. Thanks to Olga Markovna, they taught me some music, so I've been well-educated officer and intelligent.

Also I remember our literature teacher, Alevtina, and our Math teacher, Evdokia Vasilievna. I had good relationships with them and their subjects. I remember the way Evdokia Vasilievna proved the theorem: a-prim, b-prim, c-prim. When I studied in the second grade, we had an English teacher, she was Jewish. And till today I recall her 'How do you do, children?' If those studies continued, I would know English very well. Apparently, I liked many of my teachers, and I have very good memories about our school and studies.

When I studied in the eights grade, we were friends with guys from the ninth grade. We had normal relations. We didn't have such things: you are gid [kike], you are a Jew, and we won't communicate with you. Perhaps, they had some conversations, but mainly among guys one could say: 'Let's play in gid-gidovka'. This was lapta [Russian folk team game with a ball and a bat, called 'lapta'. Players of one team throw the ball with 'lapta' as far as possible, and while the ball is flying, run through the field and back. Players of another team try to catch the ball and to throw it to one of the 'enemies'], so it was called. They said it, and I said the same, I didn't know exactly what does it mean. I knew the word, but I didn't understand its real meaning.

I had very good organization skills, as I can recall. And they always 'moved' me in the field of social work. I even was senior of the class. In college I was busy in social work too; I have tens of diplomas left. So I was an active 'tovaritsch' [comrade] in all senses.

Each summer we went to Sestroretsk (Fedosia Yacovlevna preferred to rent dacha close to this town, so we moved from one village to another almost each summer). Chernichnoe, Gorskaya, Alezandrovskaya, Lissy Nos [villages of summerhouses in Leningrad district], I know all those places, because we rented dacha in Sestroretsk region and changed the place from year to year. Anyway, I was able to walk around and to see all neighborhood areas and villages. I walked and swam and collected the berries, and played football with my mates. Not only football, we played different games. And it was great fun. I went there together with our neighbor only for entire summer vacations, and parents came to visit. And even later, when I became an adult, I came there too. I've not been to the pioneer's camp for real. Once they sent me to the camp, and I quickly asked to take me away.

Father worked on Sabbaths, he had to. But apparently he had a silk cloth, called tallit, he knew Hebrew. I mean that he could pray in Hebrew, he had a dictionary Hebrew-Yiddish somewhere (it was academic issue). I can even say that he was a Jewish nationalist; I mean he thought that Jewish culture was a great culture, and Jews made a lot for humanity. I don't insist that he was a Zionist, but still he appreciated Jewish influence (I mean entire history of the world). Anyway, he had normal relations with Russians too.

Father was going to teach me Yiddish, we even began to learn alphabet. But it finished very soon, because he didn't have enough time. I understand some Yiddish, naturally, as far as I learned German at school, and it is very close to Yiddish. I know some easy everyday words, but as a matter of fact I can't say that I know this language.

We celebrated some of the Jewish holidays, maybe, Rosh Hashanah and others. Obviously, we celebrated birthdays too. All those holidays were not bright and outstanding events, there was no delicious food, and mother never cooked any special meals, no Jewish specialties either. There was no special holiday program. Only relatives came, ate and drunk, and talked about everyday life, and sang. Even when we celebrated Jewish holidays, nothing unusual happened, otherwise I would pay attention to it and would remember traditions and so on... Mother's relatives prayed, but I have no idea when, how often and where it happened. I never saw them praying and probably, I just heard something about it, maybe family legends or rumors, which fell deep inside in my memories. Father had Torah, later, when he was retired, he became more religious.

We knew that we were Jewish. But never anyone said: 'Don't speak to him because he is Russian, or don't make Russian friends' however, I know exactly that if I wanted to marry Russian girl, my mother would never allow, she would stand for the last. Never ever! Even though my parents were not Orthodox Jews, they had some ideas of traditional Jewry about what Jews should do and what shouldn't. Mother never talked about my marriage, never said: 'You shouldn't marry non-Jewish girl', but I heard that her relatives discussed this topic. All they didn't liked mixed, multi-national families and my mother wasn't exclusion. And after all, friends are one point, and the wife and questions of 'blood' were more important.

In those times in Leningrad there was not such a Jewish community. We mainly supported relations with our relatives. Perhaps, they observed some traditions and holidays. But Jews were living separately, for example we lived in the very center, and others not, all Jews were spread on the territory of city and its outskirts. I don't know if there were any kosher stores in Leningrad, I don't think so. And I don't remember if people gathered together to celebrate Jewish holidays.

There was a synagogue in Leningrad, on Lermontov [12](#) avenue [this synagogue, one of the largest ones in Europe, is still situated on the same place]. I've been there couple of times in the childhood. Parents didn't actually go to the synagogue; they just didn't have time to do that. They worked from the early morning till late evening. Where we usually went with my father on Saturday evenings. We went to banya [the place of common washing, in the URSS in most of the houses they didn't have hot water and bathrooms]. We went to banya on Fonarny pereulok [way], which was our synagogue. Of course, I'm kidding. I mean only that those visits were the only tradition we observed.

We didn't receive any help from Jewish organizations (I think, there were some Jewish organizations helping for poors) in those times. We didn't get any packages or food support. We ate very usual things, nothing special. We didn't have a possibility to ask shochet to cut our chicken; we just wanted to eat something, not looking at the way it was killed. It is shame to tell how poor we've been. Thanks to God, we stayed alive.

I don't remember, what was going on in 1933, at home we didn't discuss Hitler and how he got the power. We seldom discussed politics at home. Father wasn't a communist, and we talked sincerely. I wouldn't say that he had active anti-Soviet position, but he understood everything about soviet authorities. He didn't join the party for his own reasons, and even he didn't talk about it, but with all his view (gests and mimics) he showed what he thought about political events. Of course, he could demonstrate his feelings only when around he observed people, whom he could trust.

We spoke mainly with my father, not mother. But we didn't have long conversations. Parents called Stalin [13](#) a 'balbos', 'owner' in Yiddish. We understood what Stalin was, but it was necessary to be very careful. That's why we stayed alive. In the end of 1930s it was a hard time, when people shouldn't trust others, everyone was frightened to death, good pals and even the relatives could go and inform on you. So less you talked, more chances you had to stay alive. I always knew what and to whom I could talk about and what I should not.

We had old furniture; maybe, it was even from Vitebsk, because it was made out of red wood. And then they sold this furniture as far as they found some bacteria inside, and bought the new one. We had a bureau, a buffet, I slept behind the curtain, and they had two beds and a sofa in this room. I consider that the furniture was quite normal, but it was no free place at all, I mean that the room was very small.

I remember that I bought my first normal shoes in 1939. We didn't have good clothes, we couldn't afford buying new clothes, and the choice wasn't too big too. There was something very usual, not special, we wore what we had. For example I wore old clothes of my father, maybe I've got something from my relatives, perhaps, I wore some trousers or shirts of my cousins, I don't really remember. Of course, we had to buy something, so we did it from time to time, but it happened seldom and occasionally we bought some very ordinary clothes. We bought closes, because mother never sewed.

## **During the war**

I met the Great Patriotic War on the Lenin stadium. When World War II started, it was the wonderful summer day (it was June the 22nd of 1941), at eleven we went to the stadium to watch the game of 'Stalinetz', which later became the famous 'Zenith' [the best football team in whole city, in 1984 won the USSR championship, usually plays in the Premier league]. So we sat and waited, and time was gone, and nothing was going on, the football didn't begin. Then they announced that it won't be any football. And when we walked back home, passing Dobrolubov street [one of the central streets of Leningrad, is named after writer and critic of the nineteenth century], we heard Molotov [14](#) speech. Stalin spoke later, and Molotov had to announce the War on this day.

I served since 1941. I studied then in the special military naval school, and we've been to Lugskiy front, to Bolshoye and Maloe Karlino [small villages in Leningrad region], to Marienburg [village in Leningrad region], we've been to the second front line, or participated in building the defense lines. In Leningrad we organized the patrols, caught the rackets and racket people. The bombing had begun on September, the eighth of 1941, and our fortune was that there were plenty of rackets, all city was full of rackets, and Germans just didn't know where to throw bombs, they couldn't see anything. Also we helped to evacuate kids and school children.

I could die twice, and that's not a lie, I know exactly that forty two of my college mates were killed during the War. First, it could happen in summer of 1941, near Leningrad. Then we wore great coats, and naval great coats are black ones, so you can see them from very far away. German planes flew and threw bombs onto the houses and shut from the machine-gun. I had a shovel on my head. To my fortune, when one of those German planes approached to us and was going to throw a bomb (so we all could die), soviet fighter appeared in the sky and made him to go. And the

second time was the following one. I've been to Voronya Mountain [mountain in outskirts of Leningrad], there was a naval battery, and we were placed not far from them. We dig the fortifications; we had one gun per five people, and nearby Germans organized the carousel: their fighters, called 'Wolf' flew on the wide circle and bombed us non-stop. I've got used to it already, guessed when it was necessary to lay down. And suddenly some drunken infantry lieutenant came and began to argue with our commander. So we found out that nobody was around, no front nearby, we stand here, and nobody else stands here, neither in front of us, nor behind. Only that battery, which you can pass easily. Lieutenant shouts: 'What are you doing here? Tanks approach! Leave immediately!' And they made us to go, almost forcing to do that. So we came to Leningrad by feet, and went to our military unit.

In Leningrad they shut everywhere. College, named after Frunze [15](#) [famous Military College in Leningrad] stood on Neva River; nearby there was our military unit, it still stands over there. Now they have a memorial desk there. So I could go to my unit, using the longer path, and there was another way. That day I walked this certain way, I never walked before. And on that shorter way the projectile exploded. I can recall thousands of such accidents. On Gogol street, where my parents lived, I saw how bomb destroyed the house, I saw that this bomb flew not straight, but a little bit obliquely, it destroyed the beer kiosk and fell to the first floor. So all the stages were completely destroyed. I was a witness of how bomb destroyed the Police school on Gogol street, number 8.

During the Blockade in Leningrad there were forty four degrees colds [it was one of the coldest winters in the history of the city,]; there was no light, no electricity, no heat, and no water. Seldom, when I came home from my military unit (it happened once or twice a week), it wasn't long way, so I walked by foot. So coming back at home, I went to Neva [main city river] and brought water to my mother.

I've been to Leningrad front till March of 1942, even including March. Later the dislocation started, they sent our company to Astrakhan [big city in the lower reaches of Volga], and they supposed to send the eighth and ninth grades, which made second and third companies, to Siberia. So it happened so that they picked us to Ladoga Lake [famous lake in outskirts of Leningrad] to the Road of life [16](#) by train, and then we had to cross those forty kilometers. We were walking on the ice; it was forty degrees of cold. You walk on the ice and see all those dead bodies of evacuated Leningrad inhabitants and Soviet soldiers under the ice. Thanks to God, Germans didn't throw bombs. And we were lucky because cars and tracks went to Leningrad with wheat and stuff, and they came back absolutely empty, that's why we passed by car some part of the way, to Gikharevka station [railway station not far from Leningrad]. And there we reached the so-called Big Land. In Gikharevka they gave us some food for the first time, and it was important that they gave us only a small piece of sausage, nothing else and didn't permit to eat anything during two hours. And then we understood why they didn't let us to eat more: we saw thousands of dead people, stacks of dead people; all those people ate bread and something else at once and died from volvulus [some kind of stomach disease], they died because they were so weak that their organisms were not able to take food. To stay alive they had to eat very little, but nobody told them it about it. We all were dystrophic, and when you are coming out from the dystrophy, the diarrhea begins, because your organism can't get the food.

Then they drove some echelons, put us into sanitary barriers, where they washed us, and helped to feel normal. Then they took us to those echelons and to wagons and drove somewhere. That happened for almost forty days. We passed Volkhovstroy [small town on the river Volkhov], Kirov [today that is Vyatka, big town in the Middle Povolgi], Molotov (it's how they called Perm in soviet times); everywhere they had lights on, it looked like people don't know about the War. So throughout Ural steppes, from the opposite side, we arrived to Astrakhan and we've been there for couple of months.

Soon the story started: planes fly, throw the bombs, after all that was year 1942, Stalingrad struggle [17](#). We helped, do whatever they ordered: guarded, helped to loading. Then we've got an order to go to Baku [capital of Azerbaijan, city on the Caspian Sea]. Germans approached; and we, on the special ships, called 'seiners' [fishing ships, which were given to Soviet army], crossed the Sea, because Caspian Sea from Astrakhanian coast isn't wide, it is narrow, and big ships can't come to the bank. Anyhow, the military ship stood on the road, we reached it and in two days we finally came to Baku.

In Baku there was a military naval college. There they broke up us. Some were left in Baku, and some (and me among them) were sent to Lenkoran [town in Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea], to the military naval college of waterside defense, in the department of connection. We lost about thirty people by the way. So we've been to Lenkoran for some time, which was almost on the Persian border. Germans went to Caucasus; they gave us infantry uniform and supposed to send us to the frontline. But then Soviet troupes stopped the Germans, and just in this infantry clothes they put us on the ship and drove to Krasnovodsk [small town on the Caspian Sea], now it is situated on the territory of Turkmenistan. And only from this place through Alma-Ata [capital of Kazakhstan, today is called Almaty] to Baikal [the largest lake on the territory of the USSR, it is situated in Siberia], from plus twenty degrees by Celsius to minus twenty degrees by Celsius, and we didn't have nothing warm, neither gloves, nor coats, nothing. So they allowed us to warm up the hands in the pockets. We spent there awful half a year. We lived there in barracks, which were left from those, who were banished here. Unfortunately, I can't tell more about our trip to Baikal, because I don't remember any more stories.

Then they sent us for practice to the Far East and put us into the Pacific Ocean College. That college was built before the War, according to all necessary rules. So we were there for three months, so it was almost a Heaven. Then they put us to the so-called sixth kilometer and during next two months we were busy with painting the walls, built something and so on. There it was very cold; life was much more hard and unpleasant.

I joined the Communist Party in 1944 when I was twenty. I sincerely believed in communist future and so on. I didn't wish to get anything from this Party and never got. However, after all, militaries had to join the Party, almost all officers were communists. And actually I wanted to join the Party in 1943, when I applied for it, but they admitted me in 1944 only. And I had to pass an exam, answering some questions about history and theory of communism.

When the war started, father was forty five. I thought that he was old. It is so funny to recall that now! Anyway he wasn't old and had to serve. He served in the troupes of MPVO (which means Local Anti Air-craft Defense). They called him up, when we didn't even know that the War started. His goal was to look, where the bombs fly to, and to message their directions. He was in barracks;

he served on the factory, named after Volodarsky. In 1942 he's got a dystrophy, he even could die, mother was a little bit stronger, but she wasn't very healthy either, and due to that fact that they were very sick, they evacuated them both (father lived at home in those times too) to Ural, so finally they happened to be in Kopeisk [small town on Ural], not very far from Chelyabinsk [big metallurgical center on Ural]. There was a military factory over there, they made there rackets of 'Katusha' type. Soon my father had to go to the army again. Just after he felt a little bit better, they put him in the railway troupes, and he served till the very end of the War, and he's been to the army a year after the War too. He finished the War somewhere on the Romanian front.

When he served in the army, there were many Uzbeks. And when they had a political information [short lecture, concerning political situation in the USSR and in the World], they gave him some Uzbek text, written with Russian letters. He read this text and understood nothing, but those Uzbeks understood everything he was talking about and they were very happy with him. It happened I passed not far from Tashkent [big city in the Middle Asia, capital of Uzbekistan], I crossed whole Russia. There was a town, and there was a military unit nearby. I didn't know that my father was just right there, and we didn't meet, if I knew about it, I would try to see him, because it was very important for me: I didn't meet him for ages and I wanted to see him so much!

Also in that Military college of radio electronics we had a department of fireworks, pyrotechnics and my mates went to Kopeisk. My mates mainly were from Leningrad, including Anatoly Tolstoy. I told him: 'Please come and visit my mother'. He came to visit and there they had such a dinner, such a holiday. Of course! I didn't see my parents for four years. Mother sent me socks and tissue, a real masterpiece.

My father served in the army, I served in the army, and my mother worked there, being a cashier, which was her civil profession. Father had a big authority; he had many war medals, for example 'For guarding Leningrad' and 'For Caucasus'. Mother had some medals as well: a medal 'For guarding Leningrad' and 'For forced labor'. She's got them for working during Leningrad blockade and on the military factory on Ural. And I have sixteen medals too.

When the War started, those relatives, who stayed in Vitebsk, were evacuated or just ran away, and as a matter of fact, nobody stayed in Vitebsk during the War. They fond themselves somewhere in Russia, I don't know where exactly. The family was all sparse. Somebody later happened to be on Donbass [coal region in Ukraine], just like Frada, sister of my mother. Her husband died from typhus. Grandmother Lesya died in evacuation in Saratov [big town in Povolgi was far away from the frontline].

My cousin Zalman, son of Bertha, was killed during the War. He was on the front, and then they sent him to the school of young lieutenants, and he became the head of machine-gunners. According to statistics, head of machine-gunners lived for two weeks only and never survived. It happened because young lieutenants usually were directed to the most dangerous parts of the front, that's why the death level among them was very high. And also specialization of 'head of machine-gunners' was considered very dangerous too, because they always were on the frontline and stayed without any defense or guarding. So it happened: two weeks passed and he was killed. Efim, his brother, was a tank's guy, he survived and we still communicate a lot. Uncle Isaac was killed in Leningrad Home Guard, and uncle Naum died from anger during Blockade. Sister of my mother Emma lived in Vitebsk and then moved to Latvia in 1930s. She had a house over there. She



and her son were killed too.

Brothers of my father uncle Haim and uncle Jacob from Latvia found themselves in evacuation in Tashkent, and they stayed alive. Some of the relatives were killed, my cousin, for example, I don't know his name, and father's brother Udel. He was murdered; fascists killed him, perhaps, in a concentration camp.

My dear Fedosya Yacovlevna died in Leningrad during the Blockade. So many people died, dead people lay on the streets, and even one of our mates, when he fell, was put in the morgue. We took him away from there, from that room, where they brought bodies. He happened to be alive, thanks to God.

## **After the war**

When I turned twenty one, in 1945, I've been the lieutenant already and finished the War in Vladivostok [big city on the Far East]. We were signalers; I worked on the flagman point of Pacific Ocean Navy. That was a hill, and knolls, and inside there was the Staff, so we kept direct connection with Moscow. And I remember that vice-admiral; the Head of the Staff came and said that the War was over. That was the eighth of May, so I learned about our victory earlier than all others, and naturally I began to tell about the victory to my mates and friends. And nobody believed. So half of the day passed, and there were no official news, and they looked at me not very friendly... However, the War was really over, and they announced that later on. And then we celebrated the victory, we celebrated this day very well, we shouted 'Hurrah!' And that admiral, who announced the victory on the eight of May, died from heartache when he was announcing it officially from the tribune on the next day.

On the Far East we felt also that there would be the War with Japan (it was spring and mid-summer of 1945), we constructed mining fields, we all swam on the ship, where they had almost four hundred mines, which could explode every minute to the hell. But we were very brave; we were young and were not frightened. And then they sent me to Baltic, I asked myself to send me somewhere close to home.

I arrived to Leningrad on the tenth of July of 1945, being a lieutenant of the Military Sea Navy. Naturally, that was a great joy, a great day. I left my luggage in the camera, and through Nevsky prospect walked home by feet. I didn't see anything around. I've not been at home for four years! And that was such happiness to come back! To cross all Nevsky prospect, I couldn't even imagine that before, being front. Emotions covered me. Our house was the second one on the street, and the first one was a bank, today it is 'Aeroflot' building. When I entered into the court, and in the window I suddenly saw my aunt Bertha, and she saw me too. I heard how she gaily shouted: 'A-a-a'.

Bertha was in evacuation in Kirov, today it is called Vyatka [town in Middle Povolgi, faraway from the front]. The War just started, when she left for evacuation. Her husband's sister lived there, and my cousin Efim went to the army from that place. Coming back to Leningrad, Bertha stayed with us for while, because mother came back from evacuation, and father didn't come back from the Army.

Neighbors were so happy to see us, they all were happy about our coming back. Olga Markovna and her husband survived and they lived in this apartment for very long. We were very close to each other; I called Anatoly Yacovlevitch a 'fason' [someone, who follows the fashion], he was both our neighbor and good friend, and at the same time he was an artist and liked to be in the center of common attention. There were some other people, they were Russians. Apparently, there were not very many people in the city, Leningrad was half-empty. I was surprised that my parents, who were in Leningrad in 1941-1942, didn't catch a better living space, a better apartment. They didn't move, they returned to their room, even our house stood half-empty either. Of course, they were right. Our furniture and other values survived, because one of our neighbors became the 'head of house economy' and we were friends with her, so she didn't let anybody to take our things away.

From Leningrad I went to Baltic, to Tallinn [capital of Estonia, city on the Baltic Sea], there I had to fight with local Estonian fascists for three years and from time to time I had to participate in the tribunals. It happened because we, ten young officers came to Tallinn were kept in reserve, because they didn't know where to direct us. And we lived together with those people, who participated in tribunals, and they called us up not to find 'Forest brothers' (they continued to exist till 1949), but to take part in tribunals and sign the documents. Those forest brothers got medals from Germans, and some of them had five or six orders. So we were military assessors, and somebody, called Krumm, has been the procurer. Later they sent me back to Leningrad, I became a head of military unit inside the squadron of the destroyer of the Holding the Order of the Red Banner Baltic Navy, I had to command over thirty five sailors. Then they sent me to the highest radiolocation courses, and I started to pay attention not only to the connections, but also to radiolocation. After that I had different services: the learning detachment, ship, named after Kirov [18](#), school of radiometric. I prepared staff for Military Sea Navy. They said I was very good in teaching them. I think, I had no problems with methodic the.

After the War father tried to go to Latvia for couple of times, but they wouldn't let him to go. Latvia and Lithuania were considered almost the separate territories, and Soviet troupes stood there. But then I had to go to Riga [capital of Latvia] for some service business, and father asked me to find his relatives. He knew that they were somewhere in Dvinsk, but didn't here exactly. So when I was over with my business in Riga, I came back through Dvinsk, which is Daugavpils in Latvian. That was a nice town. When I first appeared there, they all were frightened, because I wore the uniform of soviet officers. Anyway, I found them, and Uncle Jacob with his wife aunt Hava happened to be wonderful people, I spent couple of days at them. Later father wrote letters to them and some time after he met them, and his other brother Haim too, that was his first real meeting to his brothers. So finally he met all his 'Latvian' relatives, including both brothers, their wives and children, but he never met his brother, killed in 1942, and his father, who died in 1917.

Couple of times Dad went to Daugavpils and mother went there too, because my beloved wife worked there, and my beloved daughter lived there too. My wife couldn't find any other job after she graduated from the philological faculty of Leningrad State University and post graduate course in linguistics too, so she had to go to Latvia, for that was the only place she could find, because the 'fight against cosmopolitans' [19](#) started already.

Father, who knew that his Dad died on the street, thought that he could die on the street too, that's why he always took his passport with him. So it happened. That year he died, in March there were

elections, and he wanted to go to this elections. Just in that time aunt Bertha [sister of D.Z. Levin's mother] died. Probably, it was funeral, and the weather was awful, we went to the hospital and then to the cemetery. And I told my father: 'Father, you shouldn't go to the elections'. And he answered: 'How can I not go?' and went there. We've been to the cemetery for a long while; we went there by the special funeral car. Father, it seems to me, obeyed and decided not to go to the elections, he preferred to go home. In tram he had heartache and died there. Fortunately, our pal happened to be nearby and she called me later, when I came back home. Such a life: he was afraid of such death, and that happened. Father was seventy one.

## **Marriage life and children**

How did I meet my wife? It's weird and funny, but in late 1940s, some when like 1949, I went for the dancing evening at the House of Teachers, later they called this place 'House of brides'. And there I met my future wife. It's very funny because I visited dancing evenings only two or three times in whole my life, so it was just an occasion, an accident. So we met each other, and that meeting ended with the fact that we live together for more than fifty four years. We registered our relations in September of 1949, that event took place on September, the 29th of 1949. There was no Jewish wedding, and there was no wedding at all, because we didn't have such opportunity. My parents had only a small room.

I know a lot about my wife and her parents. I know well the history of her family: her father was Jewish dressmaker from Bologoye [town in 300 kilometers to the South from Petersburg], Isaac Alpert, and her mother was a housewife, born in wealthy family of hat-maker Abram Linov. They both were Jews, her father spoke mainly Yiddish and even observed Sabbaths, and they both celebrated Jewish holidays. When I've got to know my wife, her parents lived in Moscow, because after the World War II they decided to go there to stay and care of their elder son Eizer, who was injured on the front and lost his foot.

What to us with Rebecca, we have daughter Elena, and she gave birth to son, called Sergey. Elena's husband was Russian, Vladimir Proskuryakov from peasant family; he was a scientist, exploring some fields of metallurgy. He died eight years ago in auto crash, and that was great grief for our daughter. They lived together over twenty five years. Now she is married for the second time. Her son Sergey has two children too, and our grandchildren are called Pavel and Daria. When my daughter was born, we put the child's bed in the middle of our twenty four meters' rooms in that shared apartment, where we lived. Still, those were good times, because it was the very beginning of our family life and our daughter made her first steps. Then my wife had to move to Latvia, because she couldn't find any job here, in Leningrad, and she took our little girl with her. For me it was very hard not to see them for quite a while. Fortunately, later she could get a job here, so she came back and I was happy to live with them again. Then we changed many places of living, because I was military person, and we had to move. But we never left Leningrad, which I like very much and consider my native city. In 1960s (in 1965 to be more exact), to my opinion and according to my wife's accounts, we finally moved to this apartment on Leninsky Avenue and nowadays live here for over than thirty eight years.

Our daughter grew up here, and she moved to her own apartment after she's got married in the middle of 1970s, being a student of metallurgical faculty. Later she's got the second high

education: she graduated from Moscow Psychological University (she studied there, living here; she only had to go to Moscow once per half a year to pass exams). Now she working as a psychologist in private kindergarten, but before she tried quite a few of jobs. She is very friendly person, helps to everyone, who needs her support. She takes care not only of her numerous friends, but also of her two dogs (she just took a little doggy, because that one, whom she took from the street, died) and her grandchildren, nice girl of five years and wonderful boy of three.

Even if I told my daughter that she was Jewish, I didn't pay her special attention to this fact. I'm against telling little children about their nationality. It seems to me that if you told little children about their roots, it would be worse for them. I don't know when you should start talking about it. Daughter knows very well that she is Jewish, she suffered from anti-Semitism (for example, she was trying to apply for Leningrad Pedagogical Institute for faculty of Chemistry, taught in English, but never succeed, because they wouldn't admit Jews, so finally she had to enter Gorny Institute, where my wife was teaching Russian to foreigners), and she is enough Jewish with deep understanding of Jewish traditions.

The very heyday of anti-Semitism happened to be 1951-1952. I didn't feel that then, because I was an officer, military person. To say truly, a little bit later they started some anti-Semite company in the College too. This College was not anti-Semite, our manager of personal wasn't a bad man, but they ordered him to begin the fight. In soviet times they said: 'KGB [20](#) is our Party's avant-garde'. So we met with KGB due to the Party and especially department of personal. I don't even mention that in 1948 they arrested half of the navy head, many of the Admirals, and most of them were Russians. They dismissed and arrested those Admirals because they didn't know that the so-called Cold War started and it wasn't allowed to show our 'former' English friends military equipment. They were not supposed to see some new guns, which became a secret at once. So somebody informed on them, and Naval Head decided to put them to jail.

I was very happy when this time finished, because that was such forcing, hard times, when you couldn't trust anybody and everyone was frightened and terrified. I don't think that any clever person could like this way of ruling and this regime. When Stalin died, and all that disclosures, denunciations had begun, and I felt that it was less dictator.

They wanted to send me to the Far East, but I've been married already, and my daughter was ill, she couldn't go there, to Russian Island, and I wrote a report, asking for demobilization. They didn't want to sing this report, and I had to go the Head of Staff, finally I've got an audience in Moscow and he wrote his permission on my report. So my new non-military life started. I worked in the Military Navy Institute for ten years after my demobilization, I was a scientific researcher over there, and then I completed my dissertation. That dissertation was absolutely secret, and I couldn't take its parts or necessary materials at home, so I stayed on the working place till eleven, that was going on in Pushkin [town just near Leningrad, today is considered city district, is called after Alexander Pushkin, before the Revolution – Tsarkoe or Detskoe Selo], and then came back to Leningrad. In the Military Naval Academy there were about twenty Admirals, and all they voted for what I wrote there. I was interested in so-called radio opposition, and I found out how to do so rackets wouldn't bother ships. That was a theme of my dissertation. I proved that instead of guns and torpedoes you can use special instruments, special equipment, which would direct rackets to another side, to another direction. Anyway, if I were Russian by nationality, I would be an admiral

or a big head today.

Jewish problems were solving in the USSR in such a way. When you went to some organization or institution and began to work, none paid attention to your nationality, to that fact that you are a Jew; we were just a member of this collective. But if you had to change a job, to apply for another position, here the troubles had begun. For example, I remember very well the way they admitted me, when I had to leave this Naval Institute (because of those relatives abroad).

Actually, I don't want to tell details of this story, but I can say that KGB found somehow that I had relatives abroad (I knew much less about them than Soviet authorities), because my cousins really lived in America and one of my uncles lived in Israel, so they got to know about it and decided that I shouldn't work in the military institution. And I guess also that Soviet authorities didn't like that my wife had relatives abroad either and once she went for a meeting with her cousin, who came from Israel. And then they wanted to make me a head of factory lab. All of them were not against that fact, and they were sitting one after another: the head of the factory, then secretary of partkom [local committee of Communist Party], secretary of profkom [local committee of labor union], two other heads, all of them were 'for' that decision, except that secretary of partkom. So they asked him if they should admit me or not, and he hurled the paper, which he singed, on this huge table to explain how much he didn't want to admit me. Apparently, we always had troubles with department of human resources.

I worked in the factory for one year. I was a head of construction department, and my staff even made a medal for me, because I upraised their salaries and always tried to understand them and their financial situations. However, I was quite a demanded chief, and if there was some urgent work, they had to stay longer and make it. Later I passed the competition and changed the job. I began to work on the Electro mechanical factory, and my old colleagues didn't want me to leave!

Together with Bliznyakov (one of me close friends) we were queuing five long years for small 'Moskvitch' [soviet car, made on Moscow Auto Factory], they had such four hundred first model, it cost nine thousand rubles. When I bought this car, I could not drive any car. But I've been an officer, worked in Lomonosov [town in Leningrad region, before the Revolution was called Oranienbaum], taught the sailors, and I asked one of them to show me how to drive. In few days he showed me the whole process. As a matter of fact I myself learned how to drive in three weeks, or approximately that period of time, and finally I passed the exams without studying anywhere. That was in 1956-1957.

After a week I learned how to drive my new car, (me and my wife) risked to go to Crimea through Moscow [Crimean peninsular is traditional place of rest of citizens of the country]. My wife was brave then, she didn't know what could happen on the road. And how we decided to go to Moscow: I explored the map, and counted that it takes about ten hours to reach Moscow, because Moscow is about seven hundred kilometers away from Leningrad, in that case if you make sixty kilometers per hour. So we sat and departed. And finally we were driving about twenty one hour. First we drove on the normal asphalt, but in the map they drew splendid thick line, looking like asphalt on all the way to Moscow, and that thick line stopped just in Luban [small village on the road from Leningrad to Moscow], and further there was no road at all, not talking about that asphalt one. So I stop and ask: 'What's going on? What Should I do?' and other drivers replied that till Kalinin [today it is called Tver, that town is the center of whole region, it is situated in 175 kilometers to the North

from Moscow] there was no road. So twice they drove us with a track. Later I understood that you'd better make your plans a bit more carefully, with some more extra-time. Anyway, driving this small 'Moskvitch' we went to Latvia and to Moscow too, later on.

I was a brave guy and did everything by myself. I learned to drive a motorcycle on my own. I learned how to drive 'Zighuly' [famous Soviet car] on my own too. I graduated in June of 1945 from Frunze College (I started there and graduated from College of radio connections) with best results; today it is called 'with a first class honors degree'. I often happened to be the first one, for example I first wrote the dissertation from whole my course.

In those days sometimes I went to 'Astoria' [one of the most expensive hotels and restaurants in Leningrad], not certainly with my wife, I mean that I could go there with my mates or friends, or colleagues. I served, and then I was employed in the Military Institute, and when officers got the salary, we went to 'Astoria', as far as we got good salaries, comparing to other's ones. In 'Astoria' they had a 'Hole', such a small buffet. We took the glass of champagne, some cognac and a chocolate, so nobody turned to be drunk. We often gathered together with my course mates, I took my wife to those meetings too. Not talking about other events: daughter of some of my colleagues gets married or something else. But I don't like to go to the restaurant with no purpose, just to have a dinner; I prefer to eat at home, because in the restaurant you can't even talk normally.

All my free time I gave to reading. When I was working in Pushkin and lived in Leningrad, I had to use train. So everyday, on the way home and back, I had almost an hour to read. I read then a lot of books (both fiction and scientific ones), and now I also try to read a lot.

## Recent years

While I was employed in the so-called 'closed' institutions, and that was quite a while, we couldn't even think about leaving the country, emigration and so on. We didn't even think about it, we couldn't imagine that. This idea came, when people began to leave, when the first wave of emigration had begun in 1970s. We didn't know about our relatives in those times: who is where. Many of our pals, even our neighbors left for Israel and America, and some of our friends either. When so-called 'dopusk' [permission to work with secret materials] was over, and we could leave freely, my daughter married the Russian guy, and didn't suppose to leave. She had a job; he was assistant head of the science department of a scientific research Institute. They lived not very well, but not too bad, even they had some problems with apartments and didn't go abroad. Later, when we together with my wife came back from our travel to Israel (it was in 1990), they asked us why we came back. I answered that my wife was too hot, she can't live there. So the question wasn't asked any more. Then we went to the USA, and my wife said: 'we can't live here, we can't stay here, because our beloved daughter wouldn't leave, she wants to stay in the USSR (it was in 1991, last year when USSR ever existed). To explain briefly, in 1990s, when we had an opportunity to immigrate our family couldn't agree what country to choose. My wife says: 'I would like to go to Germany'. But I don't want to live there, because I don't wish to live on the land of fascists. I know that in Germany things changed a lot, but I still can't forgive Germans for Holocaust. So as a result we didn't go anywhere, even we had such thoughts. However, I can't say that it's a pity that we didn't emigrate.



Apparently, Jews in soviet times had to do twice more to achieve any goal, than people of the main nationality had to do. Even if they gave us an apartment, some people had got this apartment for free, and we had to buy it for money. Even I, who appreciated the soviet power, was a member of Communist Party, officer of Military Navy; I had to do much more to influence the authorities. And sometimes it helped. For example, my wife likes to recall how I went to Moscow to Ministry of Education and asked to find her a job, because she can't find anything on her own. That took place in 1951. Finally I've got what I wanted: they sent her to Latvia, to Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute. Then, in late 1950s or early 1960s, I don't remember exactly, I went to Leningrad local department of education and asked to employ her for the second time, because she couldn't find normal job again. And this ordinary Russian woman, sitting there, advised Rebecca to apply for teacher's position in Gorny Institute. She said my wife would win the competition and pass the interview, if she went there when its rector, famous with his anti-Semite looks, would be on vacations. So she did and as a result, worked in Gorny Institute for ages, for more than twenty years, I think.

I didn't feel anything about the 'death' of Eastern block. I didn't worry very much about falling of Berlin wall. I was very indifferent about all those events. And democratization did it ever happen? Of course, democracy is much better. However, I think that we don't have full democracy nowadays. But I liked what was going on in 1989. What to me, I'm calmer now. I didn't have to change anything in my life, I was too old to change things, I mean that my life has been stabilized already, and my family relations, my daughter, her child and my work were much more important for me than any political events.

I still work on the Leningrad Electromechanical Factory; I participate in researches of electromagnetic compatibility. I work part-time, five hours per day, everyday, except Friday, and my head is happy with it. They say that I'm still necessary.

Up to today I support all Israeli actions. I don't appreciate Palestinians, I consider them terrorists. Israel guards its territories. I say that not because I'm a Jew, but because it is necessary to understand the whole situation. When we've been to Israel, I saw a village and two or three olive trees nearby, and those trees don't need any care, that is the way how Arabs live. And I trust in labor and honesty of people.

I've not been to Israel before 1989. I didn't support contacts with my relatives; I had to refuse from that natural thing. That was considered as 'connection to foreigners', and I couldn't afford that [21](#). After my cousin Esther [daughter of father's brother Jacob] left for Israel, we didn't keep in touch for years; we didn't talk to each other more than thirty years, because it wasn't allowed.

With those relatives, who live in Leningrad, I communicate both by phone and personally with great pleasure. I've been to my mother-in law, while she lived in Moscow. Now I write letters to America and to Israel, where my cousin Esther lives and we have very warm relations. I'm very glad that I've got to know my Israeli relatives, they happened to be normal people, they met us very well. In America our relatives are ordinary people, they are average Americans, representatives of the middle class, one is engineer, and another one – my cousin Mark, son of my father's sister, he works at the United Nations, his sister Doda lives there too with her husband Fred. After all, my trip to Israel in 1990 influenced me very much. I felt like I was a cinema hero: wonderful nature, beautiful buildings. Everything breathes with history. Here you see one Bible story, and there is another one. Great place to visit!

It was my first trip to 'capitalist' country. Earlier I've been to Romania only, in 1960s, together with my wife. But this trip to Israel made much stronger impression, it influenced me and my relation to God (this is too private, so I'm not going to talk about this side of the trip). I had a feeling that I happened to be in the cinema hall, not among the audience, but from the other side of the scene. There was a Paradise, and here we had nothing in 1990. Beautiful towns, especially Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, plenty of cars and food... We went to supermarket instead of theatre, and my wife was afraid to get lost there. We've been to Tiberian Lake, Kineret, and learned a lot about Christ as well. Just when we've been there they found some note, where Pilate's name was written, and everyone discussed this discovery, I was impressed with it too! One of my relatives bought six or eight kinds of cheese in supermarket, while we didn't have any. We went to Italian and Japanese restaurants, we've been to Arabian towns, and we've seen a lot and were afraid of nothing. That was gorgeous trip!

In 1991 we went to the USA. Here New-York impressed me most of all. I read before in newspapers that New-York is very dark city. Not at all, that isn't true! Everywhere you see the lights and sun is shining and so on. We've been to Princeton University, to Einstein lab, and to United Nations, of course. I was very surprised that instead of museum ticket in American museums you can use some special sign, put it on you cloth and go wherever you want to. New-York is very compressed, dynamic, and Washington is much alike Petersburg with its wide and green streets. And I liked people there, they are much more honest and pleasant than Russians and smile all the time.

Itsik, brother of my father, died in America, and I met there his children, my cousins: both males and females. They, besides, came here too. Itsik was involved there in some party activities; he was one of the leaders of social-democrats. He was big man over there. I think, he lived in New-York, I don't know if he was religious, but I don't think so. And our American relatives aren't religious at all. I mean that I didn't see that they prayed or observed Sabbaths.

To be honest, I always liked Jews more than Russians I thought that they are more reliable. Among my own friends half are Jews, and half are Russians. But mainly I was involved in Russian society because I was an officer, and there are not so many Jews among them. However, among sailors there are more Jews comparing to the other kinds of troupes. But I didn't choose Jewish friends with purpose.

My own family that Jewish family for sure, and that family, according to its possibilities and forces, tried to assimilate, tried to participate in Russian life, but still we felt like we were Jews. After all, from time to time, they made us to recall that we were Jews, not Russians; they didn't admit us for jobs, made some other awful things. However, I never thought that I shouldn't communicate with Russians; even I heard such expression as 'goy', that meant 'Russian' for me. I know that actually goy means 'non-Jewish', but for me 'non-Jewish' is the same as Russian. Our family happened to be in the middle of two cultures, it is still Jewish, but it could turn to the Russian one, if Russians behaved better. I'm always kidding that I'm a bad Jew, because I don't know Jewish language. But I'm still a Jew! Even the bad one!

We celebrated some of the Jewish holidays, but not after the War, I mean only in the last few years. They bring us food packages from 'Eva' [Jewish society of retired people in Petersburg], and I find inside special booklets about holidays, we read them and then follow the instruction what to do and how to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, for example.

I'm a great fan of Jewish meals. Matzah is one of my favorite foods. I eat it with the great pleasure. Mother of my wife, Esphir Abramovna, she cooked Jewish meals very well: she cooked soup with kletzks, something else. My mother cooked gefelte fish [traditional Yiddish meal] we had a lot of tasty Jewish meals at home.

We don't go to the synagogue, I have no strong wish to go there and pray. I pay more attention to self-education, I try to understand what's going on, and that is really interesting for me. Now I feel like Jewish much stronger than I used to.

I think that local Jewish community develops, and it works normally, especially 'Hesed Abraham' [Petersburg Charity Center, which offers help to retired people]. I communicate with their staff, sometimes I go there and I get packages on Jewish holidays. Thanks them very much for this support.

### **Glossary:**

1. Russian stove: Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.
2. Chagall, Marc (1889-1985): Russian-born French painter. Since Marc Chagall survived two world wars and the Revolution of 1917 he increasingly introduced social and religious elements into his art.
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 WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.
4. NEP: The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.
5. Gerasimov Sergey (1906-1985): Famous soviet cinema director, author of the 'Young guard'. Together with his wife, actress Tamara Makarova, organized his own studio in Russian State Institute of Cinema, many famous actors were their pupils.
6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Gogol, Nikolai (1809-1852): Russian novelist, dramatist, satirist, founder of the so-called critical realism in Russian literature, best known for his novel the Dead Souls (1842).

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

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

11. Gertzen, Alexander I. (1812-1870): Russian revolutionary, writer and philosopher.

12. Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841): Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

13. Stalin: the Communist Party leader, Supreme Commander in-Chief, ruled the country in 1924-1953. Used totalitarian methods of ruling, provided police of soviet people' genocide.

14. 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.

15. Frunze, Mikhail (1885-1925): Soviet political and military leader.

16. Road of Life: Passage across the Ladoga Lake in winter. It was due to the Road of Life across the frozen Lake Ladoga that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

17. Stalingrad struggle: key struggle during The Great Patriotic War, its main events took place in winter of 1942-1943. It happened on Volga; as a result general Paulus' group was surrounded and demolished by soviet troupes.

18. Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934): Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

19. Campaign against 'cosmopolitans': the campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated 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'.

20. KGB: Committee of State Security, the punishing organ, which main functions were to provide external State security, and also to fight against opposition and dissidents inside the country.

21. 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.