

Semyon Levbarg

Kiev
Ukraine

Semyon Levbarg lives in a green neighborhood in Kiev nearby a huge park. He was wearing his home outfit when we met and felt a little shy about it. He apologized for taking a few minutes to change and appeared again wearing a snow-white shirt, black trousers and a bow tie. If I hadn't known that he was an engineer I would have believed him to be an actor or a musician. Semyon lives in a three-room apartment with his son and his family. Their apartment needs repairs badly. There is a sewing machine on the table and Semyon explains to me that he is making a dress for his granddaughter. One can tell that they are not a wealthy family. There is an old TV set and an obsolete music center in the room, however they have many books and records. Semyon and I take our time selecting pictures from a family photo album. When we start our interview Semyon apologizes for not remembering names or events. He had a stroke recently and has to take a lot of medications. However, he is willing to tell me his story in the memory of his loved ones. Well, we failed to put this interview together. Semyon got tired easily, couldn't remember dates or got confused about them and could remember very little about his past. Half a year passed and we met by chance in Hersed. Semyon felt better and told me many interesting things about himself and his family.

I didn't know my maternal or paternal grandparents. I got my last name from my father: Levbarg means 'lion's hill' in Yiddish. Grandfather Solomon, my father's father, was a Synagogue Elder in a small Jewish town in Kiev region. I can't remember where exactly he lived. My father told me that my grandfather spent all days through at the synagogue. They were a poor family living in a small decrepit house. My father's parents died in early 1910s, long before I was born. My father's brothers and sisters died in infancy. There were few of them, but I don't know how many. My father Ovsey Levbarg, born in 1883 in that same town grew up in the religious environment of his home. He studied at cheder and later had classes at home with a melamed. My father got a religious Jewish education. He knew prayers and read the Torah and the Talmud in Hebrew. My father didn't study any crafts. He was preparing to be a religious activist.

My mother's parents – grandfather Zalman and his wife and my grandmother, whose name I don't know. Their last name was Myshelovski. Their family was deeply religious. My mother told me that grandfather Zalman also held a position at the synagogue. I knew one of my mother's sisters Leya. She was an older sister. She visited us several times. Leya died from typhoid or hunger in early 1920s. I don't remember my grandfather or grandmother Myshelovskiye. They visited us when I was a little boy. They died in early 1920s.

My mother Hana Myshelovskaya, born in approximately 1890, finished a Jewish primary school. She married my father approximately in 1908. I believe they met each other through matchmakers and their parents' agreement that was a usual procedure at that time. Shortly after they got married my parents moved to Kiev where my father bought a small two-room apartment on the 2nd floor of a 4-storied building in Elenovskaia Street in Podol [1] after he sold his parents house.

In this apartment in 1910 my older sister Sarra was born and on 20th July 1914 I was born and named after my grandfather Solomon Levbarg. One of my first memories was how we were hiding in the basement of our house from pogrom makers [2] during the Civil War [3]. I couldn't understand why we had to be quiet and my sister literally clogged my mouth with a piece of bread or other food to make me sit quiet. From the first years of my life I was used to traditional Jewish way of life that our family led. My father was a gabbai at the synagogue in Schekavitskaia street in Podol [the only functioning synagogue in Kiev during the Soviet times] and a shochet at the kosher slaughterhouse near the synagogue. Early in the morning my father put on his tallit and miniature boxes with parts of the Torah on his hand and forehead - tefillin- and prayed in his room for a long time and then he went to the synagogue. He spent at the synagogue all day. My mother was also very religious. She prayed at home and went to synagogue on Saturday and on holidays. On Friday my mother and sister thoroughly cleaned our apartment, washed the floor and polished wooden furniture with kerosene and the nickel beds – with chalk. She covered the table with a fancy tablecloth and cooked a meal in the Russian stove [4]: Gefilte fish, chicken, stew, little pies and doughnuts and sweet fruit drink. On Friday evening we waited for our father to come back from the synagogue wearing clean clothes. My mother always wore a kerchief or a lace shawl recited a prayer, lit

candles and we celebrated Sabbath. My mother and father didn't do any work on Saturday and we, kids, walked in the yard. There was a warm meal in the oven that we had after our parents came home from the synagogue. There were always one or two visitors sharing a meal with us on Saturday. They were poor Jews.

My parents observed kashrut: we had separate utensils for meat and dairy products and never mixed these. When I turned six I went to the synagogue with my parents on Saturday. My father and I were on the first floor and my mother went up to the gallery where she stayed with other women. We celebrated all Jewish holidays at home. At Yom Kippur my father and mother fasted and my father stayed at the synagogue a whole day. My sister and I also fasted after we turned 6.

I remember Pesach best. The house was thoroughly cleaned. Our everyday utensils and crockery were replaced with special dishes for Pesach. We got rid of chametz: leftovers of bread and yeast products, that were burnt in the oven. Matzah was brought from synagogue in big baskets covered with flax cloth. My mother cooked a festive meal with puddings and pancakes from matzah. Our father conducted the first seder reclining on pillows. I asked him traditional questions. I remember only one of them: 'Why do we usually eat bread and matzah while today we only eat matzah?' I remember looking for a piece of matzah that my father hid from me and this was a part of the ritual. When I found it I was praised and given something delicious.

When I turned five a melamed from the synagogue began to teach me at home. He taught me Yiddish, basics of religion and general education and told me about the history of Jewish people. This was like a cheder for one pupil. I went to school at 6 and a half. This was a Jewish primary school at first, but after I finished my second year it was made a Russian school. However, the only difference was that we switched to the Russian language since the curriculum remained without changes. I stayed in this school. My father was right to think that one needed to know Russian to do better in the future. I studied well. I was fond of mathematics and physics. I became a pioneer at school. I remember the ceremony in the concert hall at school. Senior pupils tied red neckties on us and took an oath of devotion to the cause of Lenin. My father had no objections to this. He understood that I had to keep pace with the requirements of a new way of life. Even though I was a pioneer I went to the synagogue with my parents on holidays. Of course, I didn't wear my necktie when going to the synagogue. He didn't tell me to go to the synagogue, but I knew that he liked it when I went there so I wanted to please him. I also had a bar mitzvah at the age of 13. My father prepared me to this ceremony teaching me to put on a tefillin and prayers. He understood that I would not be religious in the future, but wanted me to go through this ritual. Of course, none of my friends – and I had Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian friends – knew that I had a bar mitzvah. If I had spoken about it I might have been expelled from the pioneer organization and probably from school. This was in late 1920s, when any religion was declared outlawed and persecuted [Struggle against religion] [5]. My father told me to not mention that he was a senior man at the synagogue. He knew that it was better to keep silent about things at that period of time. I didn't even tell my best friend Lyova Golfman about this. I was an active pioneer at school. I especially liked parades on 1st May and October Revolution Day [6]. We gathered at school and went to Kreschatik, the main street in Kiev carrying flags and slogans. We didn't celebrate any Soviet holidays at home, even though my father accepted the soviet power.

After finishing lower secondary school I entered the Ship Mechanics Faculty of Kiev River Technical School. I didn't mention to my new friends that I met there that my father was a deeply religious man and didn't invite my friends home.

Since I didn't mention to anyone at school that my father was a gabbai I managed to join the Komsomol [7] league at this school. Although I respected my father's faith I was a young man of that time: I believed in communist ideas and took an active part in the first five-year plans [8] and construction of communism. I was an active Komsomol member and took part in Komsomol meetings and was also a subbotnik [9]. I tried to be no different from others I didn't want any extra acknowledgement of my diligence since if Komsomol officials decided to offer me some position they would have revealed the history of my family. My friends at the technical school were Ukrainians and Russians from Kiev region; they lived in the hostel. We got along well. They were especially warm during the famine in Ukraine [10] in 1932-33. Our family didn't suffer from hunger in 1920s or 1930s. I managed to even bring some food to my friends. They didn't ask me where I got food that was a luxury at the time, but were grateful for my support. In those years I also changed my name from Solomon to Russian Semyon. My father insisted that I did it. I had to write a request to have my name changed where I wrote that I wanted to change it for the sake of euphony, but my father explained to me that this would help me in the future.

My sister had finished a medical school by then and worked as a midwife in a maternity home in Kiev. She was also a Komsomol member and was not religious. My parents did not demonstrate their religiosity. They didn't invite guests at Sabbath or Jewish holidays and their celebrations became quiet.

In 1933 I finished my technical school and went to work at the 'Lenin's forge' plant. Graduates of higher educational institutions were released from service in the army and so were workers at the plant. I began my career as assistant foreman at the shipyard and later became a foreman. In those years of the first five-year plan periods we believed in the bright future and believed ourselves to be builders of communism and socialism. I was fond of work and didn't notice what was happening around me. In 1936 arrests [Great Terror] [11] began: the management of the plant was arrested. Their replacement didn't last long and were arrested, too. We were young and still believed that everything happening in the country was just and fair. Fortunately, none of our acquaintances suffered. There were 'enemies of the people': Trotskyites [12], Zinovievists [13] and spies working for all possible foreign intelligence services. My friends and I understood that there must have been something wrong about it and that people that were devoted to the Party and the people couldn't have possibly been enemies. However, nobody dared to pronounce it: they said, even 'walls had ears', such was the time. Religion and religious people were persecuted. My father became even a bigger conspirator than he used to be. He only wore his kippah at home and at the synagogue. In summer he wore a cap and in winter he wore a warm hat. However, my parents kept observing Jewish traditions, but I didn't. I worked on Saturday and couldn't celebrate Sabbath. Besides, I had meals at a canteen at the plant where I ate what they offered. The synagogue in Schekavitskaia street never closed except for during occupation and my father continued working there. I had never been there before 1946. I grew up an atheist and I didn't care about such things and secondly, it might have had a negative impact on my life and career. At this period very few people attended synagogues. Most of them were elderly people that had nothing to be afraid of.

My sister Sarra married a Jewish man. It was common to marry in the registry offices. They had small wedding party. Sarra and her fiancé were Komsomol members and atheists and any religious rituals or even a chuppah were out of the question. They had a small dinner with friends and relatives after a civil ceremony in a registry office. Her husband was in the military. They moved to Belarus. I saw her last in 1936. She came to Kiev on vacation in 1940, but I was not in Kiev any longer. I don't remember her husband or his name. I know that Sarra died in evacuation somewhere in Central Asia. She had two children: son Zinovi and daughter Elena. I met with Zinovi and Elena once after the Great Patriotic War [14]. In the early 1950s they lived in Gomel [today Belarus] with their father and his second wife. My distant relatives told me they are married and have children. Again, I've never seen them. All of them moved to the US in 1980s. Regretfully, I have no contacts with them.

My father was very concerned that I might have problems due to his religiosity. Therefore, when in 1937 I was offered a job at the Komsomol construction site in Nakhodka [Far East, in 8000 km from Kiev] where they were building a shipyard he was even glad that I got an opportunity to move away. Even though this meant that we were not going to see each other for a long while, he was glad that I would be away from Podol and the synagogue and would be involved in the construction of a new life. My friends and I went to the Far East on a Komsomol assignment. We traveled by train. Our trip lasted for over two weeks. In the carriage we sang new patriotic songs from the movies that we liked: 'Spacious is my native land', 'March of enthusiasts' and others.

There was a big shipyard to be built in Nakhodka. This was a gigantic construction site and there were probably about ten thousand workers to be involved in it. We were accommodated in barracks and in few months we moved to a hostel that was like a barrack only there were more comforts. We worked three shifts and the night shift was the most difficult, but we were young and made a strong team. There was no national segregation: workers were the children of proletariat and peasantry. They came from various towns of the USSR. We didn't have these Komsomol meetings to condemn 'enemies of the people'. We were far from the Central Party and Komsomol offices and it made our life there more democratic. We worked and were equal. I was soon elected a crew leader of our crew of ship mechanics. Since we completed our five-year plans and did higher scopes of work than scheduled I was awarded a medal 'For work achievements' by the government. It was a very honorable award handed by high officials in the Kremlin. We were invited to Moscow to receive our awards, but it was too far from where I was and I decided to postpone this trip until I went to visit my parents in Kiev. My plans were not to come true: the Great Patriotic War began.

I was at a training near Moscow when the war began. In 1940 I and some other young builders were sent to have advanced training at a big plant in a small town near Moscow. I don't remember its name. It was a 6-month

course and upon its completion I was to become an engineer. On 20th June 1941 we received our certificates and on 22nd June the Great Patriotic War began. I went to the military registry office. However, in those first days only those born in 1915 were recruited. I didn't go back to the Far East since I had been registered at the registry office near Moscow and was to wait for their further instructions. I began to work as a mechanic at same plant where I had training and lived in the hostel of the plant.

In July 1941 my parents informed me that they were going to evacuation. They went to the Far East and got accommodation in a small settlement near Vladivostok. I don't remember its name. I received several letters from them that I responded to.

Between 1941- spring 1942 I was called to take training as a Navy officer three times. I knew that before long I was going to be recruited to the Navy. In winter 1942 I wrote a letter to the Kremlin requesting them to give me my award 'for work achievements', that I was supposed to have received back in 1940, but never actually got time to get it. I got an invitation to come there. There were over 100 other young people. Mr. Badaev, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, [The Supreme Soviet (Supreme Council) comprised the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union. It had the power to pass constitutional amendments.] was giving awards this time. We were photographed after the ceremony was over. I still have this photograph. In May 1942 I was recruited to the army in the rank of lieutenant.

I got to the front in November 1942. I was assigned to 143 Separate Red Banner Constanta [major port in Romania] marine battalion of the Black Sea Navy. I was a platoon leader there. We were at the very frontline. Our life was always at risk. Usually only about 10% of all marines survived in each combat action. [Editor's note: sounds unusually high.] During my first days there I took part in defense of Taman [a town on the Black and Azov Sea on the side of the Caucasus Mountains]. I remember vividly some episodes of the war.

On 24th September 1943 I took part in the landing on Peschanaya spot near Taman. My platoon was one of the first to jump into water from a boat and get to the shore. We attacked the enemy and occupied a beach-head [on the side of the Crimea]. The battle on the spot lasted 9 days non-stop. We were to break through the so-called 'Blue line' defense line of the enemy. I lead my platoon in attacks one hundred times and repulsed enemy's attacks. Then we started operations to prepare to attack Kerch [a town in the Crimea, spreading 80 km along the eastern shore of the peninsula]. Right before this operation I joined the Communist Party. There was no ceremony. All applicant officers received Party membership cards before the battle. I was appointed a commanding officer of a group of marines that included machine gunners, rifle men and mortar men. Our unit landed on the right wing of Kerch on 9th January 1944. In a few days attacks of the town began. I lead my soldiers and killed about 40 enemy-soldiers in that battle. I was awarded a 1st grade order of the Patriotic War for Kerch. We stayed some time in the rear until our battalion was sent to attack ports on the Black Sea. At the end of August 1944 I took part in marine landings to the Romanian port of Constanta. I was assistant Chief of Headquarters of the battalion. I was also in a special unit that captured and disarmed the Romanian Navy. For these operations I was awarded the orders of Red Star and Red Banner. I was moving to the West – in the direction of Berlin - with my battalion on vehicles and tanks. In spring 1945 I took part in combat action in Vienna in Austria. The war was over when I was there. This was a lovely sunny day of 9th May 1945 [15] – Victory Day. We were all happy, hugged and kissed each other. This was a holiday with tears in our eyes. We recalled our comrades that hadn't lived to see this day and our relatives and friends that perished in this war.

I had many friends in our unit. They were brave and courageous men. There were Jews among them. In postwar years I often heard that Jews stayed in Tashkent to be away from the war, but I was always overwhelmed with anger when heard this. [Tashkent is a Central Asian city, where many people were evacuated during World War II, including Jewish families. It was a common anti-Semitic accusation in the Soviet Union that during the war Jews hid in Central Asia instead of taking part in the fight of the Soviet people.] I remember Zoia and Alexandr Polonski, husband and wife. They were Jews. When her husband was recruited to the army Zoya volunteered to the army and convinced the registry office to assign her to the same military unit as her husband. They were at the front until the end of the war and then returned home. Zoia died in 1948 from her numerous wounds and I lost track of Alexandr. I had other Jewish friends that were lost to the war.

I received letters from my father and tried always to respond them. Sometimes I received letters that had been mailed a month before. He wrote me about my mother. In 1943 she died from hunger and hard life in evacuation. After the war was over my father continued living at the Far East.

I continued my military service after the war was over. In summer 1945 I took part in a special task. We were ordered to lead the navy of the Soviet Zone of occupied Germany that was given to our country as reparation. Since I was a military I followed the orders of my commandment without thinking about their political or ethical meaning. We were ordered to move few dozens of German battleships equipped with newest weapons to the port of Kronshtadt in Leningrad. In autumn 1945 I was called to the headquarters of our regiment. They offered me to stay in the army. They intended to send me to the Baltic Republics to reconsolidated Soviet power and struggle against nationalists [Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (the three Baltic Republics) were occupied by the Soviet Union in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1940, aiming at dividing Eastern Europe to German and Soviet spheres of influence. For 51 years the Baltic States remained occupied by the Soviet Union and were able to regain political independence only with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in September 1991.] I requested demobilization from the army. My decision was motivated by the fact that I had an aging father that was alone. In December 1945 I demobilized from the Soviet army. I had a number of orders and medals and a wonderful Letter of Recommendation from our commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Levitski. I returned to Kiev.

I immediately went home: there were other tenants in our apartment; I stayed with my school friend Lyova Golfman. In few weeks I met my father, who returned from evacuation. My father looked old and exhausted. He was grieving hard after my mother. He cried when I hugged him. He told me that he prayed for me every day begging the Lord to save me. He said 'Son, our Lord that you don't believe in has guarded you'. It occurred to me that I wasn't even wounded once during the war.

In some time I managed to get back our apartment via the court. I came back from the front and authorities helped us to have our problems resolved easier. Although we returned to our apartment we had to buy everything we needed; all our furniture and other belongings were gone. Life was difficult during the postwar years, but my father never stopped observing Jewish traditions. At first he attended the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street that opened recently. Then, when he got ill and it was difficult for him to walk there he began to pray in a nearby house where a minyan was put together. In 1948 my father died. I tried to organize a Jewish funeral in accordance with our traditions. Although my father was buried in a coffin his body was wrapped in cerement and a rabbi recited prayers. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

I didn't work in the first months after I returned to Kiev. The military registry office awarded me a stay at a recreation center in Puscha Voditsa near Kiev. There were many other veterans of the war. We had a good time. We got good meals and went to cinema or dancing in the evenings. We were happy and believed that the worst times were gone. After I returned home from the recreation center I got a job in the 'Ukrsovkhozspetsstroy' trust (design and construction of enterprises in rural areas). I was an engineer there. I didn't mention, though, that my father was a religious Jew and that he worked at the synagogue before the war. I worked in this organization until retirement. I was promoted to the position of head of department.

I was an active communist. For a few years I was secretary of the Party unit of our company conducting meetings and struggling for increase of labor productivity. We celebrated Soviet holidays – 1st May and 7th November at work. We went to parades. There were many Jews in our organization. When the period of state anti-Semitism began in 1948 and Jews were accused of all deadly sins, beginning from cosmopolitanism [16] and ending with the 'doctors' plot' [17] when Jewish doctors were accused of poisoning the Party leaders it actually didn't have any impact on me. I hated to read in newspapers or hear on the radio threats addressed to 'rootless cosmopolites' or 'doctors poisoners' where there were only Jewish names involved, but this all seemed to be happening somewhere far away, in Moscow, in high echelons of the power. It had no impact on my acquaintances either. Of course, I didn't believe what newspapers wrote, but I was afraid to even acknowledge that it could occur to me. I still believed that everything happening in our country was just and that there was some overdoing, but it was impossible to build communism without them. When Stalin died in 1953 I attended a meeting and was grieving along with all others. It never occurred to me that the 'father of the people' was to blame for arrests and death of many thousands of people. In 1956 I was one of the first to hear about this (there was a closed letter of Nikita Khrushchev [18] to Party units issued on XX Congress [19] of the Party, and I was secretary of a Party organization). I couldn't believe this could happen, but the course of time offered more and more evidence that this was true. It became known that Stalin was preparing deportation of Jews to Birobidjan [20]. This information was a final drop that put an end to my loyal attitude toward Stalin.

In 1951 my friend Lyova introduced me to his wife's friend Sarra Krol. Sarra was born to a common Jewish family in Kiev in 1924. Her father Iosif worked in a store and her mother was a housewife. Before the Great patriotic War Sarra finished 9 years of a Russian secondary school. During the war Sarra's family was in evacuation in Yangiyul, in Uzbekistan. Sarra finished secondary school there. When they returned to Kiev after the war Sarra entered the College of Public Economy. When I met her Sarra was a planner in a trade organization. Sarra and I fell in love. We got married in 1952. Although I was a member of the Party and didn't mention my father's religiosity at work I decided to have a Jewish wedding. Sarra and I had a chuppah at the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street where my father had worked his whole life. We had a religious wedding in secret. Only Sarra's parents and my friend Lyova Golfman and his wife were at the wedding. The rabbi recited a prayer. I drank a glass of red wine, broke the glass with my shoe and we signed a wedding contract. There was no party at the synagogue. Our guests wished us happiness and gave their wedding gifts: crockery and bed sheets that were hard to get at that time. Later we had a wedding party at home where we invited our relatives and friends. We agreed to use our neighbors' apartment as well since we had about 30 guests at the wedding.

In 1953 our son was born. I named him Evsey after my father: Evsey is a Russian name and Ovsey is a Jewish name. They sound alike. At that time I couldn't give my son a Jewish name since it might cause a lot of teasing and mockery. My wife and I tried to raise him a Jew. Every year I fasted at Yom Kippur in the memory of my father. We always had matzah at Pesach, even in those years when it might have jeopardized my career and membership in the Party. Our acquaintances, older Jews, bought matzah from the synagogue and brought it to us in the evening so that nobody could see. However, we ate bread at Pesach as well. We celebrated Chanukkah and New Year [Rosh Hashana]. We had small parties with our relatives. We didn't celebrate Sabbath or follow kashrut since we were not religious Jews, but just gave tribute to the memory of our ancestors. Our son always identified himself as a Jew. After finishing school he went to Leningrad where he entered the Collage of Optics. After finishing his studies Evsey returned to Kiev. He couldn't find a job for a long time. He was a physicist, but he was a Jew and potential employers refused to hire him. He finally got a job at the Institute of Standardization. He is an engineer at the State Standard Agency now.

We've had a good life. We went to theaters and concerts at the Philharmonics together. In summer we spent vacations in the Crimea or the Caucasus having trade union discounts. We didn't have a dacha [cottage] or a car. We were two engineers and couldn't afford such luxuries. At the end of 1960s we received a three-room apartment. This is where we still live with our son and his family. We never complained about our lives and were content with what we had. Many of our friends emigrated to Israel or the USA, but I never considered leaving my country. I think Israel is a great country. I wish there was no war there. However, I never wanted to leave the country where I live and the country that I struggled for during the war. Even when my wife's sister Tsylia sent us an invitation enabling us to submit our documents for emigration we didn't do it. My wife and I thought the same. I lived a happy life with my wife. How sad that Sarra died from a stroke in 1997. I buried her at the Jewish sector of the town cemetery without following any Jewish traditions.

I didn't think much about perestroika when began in 1980s. I believed it was another action of authorities. It didn't change my life much. During the Soviet period I received a big pension, but then it was reduced.

My son was a bachelor for many years until he got married in early 1990s. His wife, Lena is Russian. I wasn't against their marriage. I was glad that my son was happy. In 1997 their daughter Anna was born. In early 1990s Jewish life began to revive after Ukraine gained independence. There were numerous Jewish organizations established. My son became deputy chairman of the society of Jewish culture 'Sholem Alechem'. My son didn't become religious which is a usual thing considering that he grew up in Soviet society. However, he studies and promotes Jewish culture and history and is very fond of Judaism. His wife Lena is also fond of these. She has a Doctorate in Arts and works at the Conservatory, but she also lectures at the Jewish society and helps Evsey in his work. Their daughter Anna attends a Jewish kindergarten.

I am happy to be living with those that I love and that love me in my old age. I wish I could spend more time with people of my age. I speak to them on the phone and attend the Daily Center at the society of Jewish culture in Hesus. I read Jewish newspapers and try to keep pace with life. I am interested in the Jewish history and culture. I haven't come to observing Jewish traditions. I haven't become a religious person. I do not celebrate any Jewish holidays either, but I try to get more information about them. The only thing I've never failed to observe is fasting at Yom Kippur in the memory of my father. At home we celebrate our birthdays, calendar New Year and our favorite and dear holiday – 9 May, the Victory Day.

GLOSSARY:

- [1] Podol: The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.
- [2] Pogroms in Ukraine: In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.
- [3] 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.
- [4] 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 winter time.
- [5] 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.
- [6] October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.
- [7] Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.
- [8] Five-year plan (5-year plans of social and industrial development in the USSR), an element of directive centralized planning, introduced into economy in 1928. 12 5-year periods between 1929-90.
- [9] Subbotniks, voskresniks – voluntary unpaid work on Saturday and Sunday 'for a well-being of people's Motherland' in Russia initiated by Lenin.
- [10] Famine in Ukraine: in 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.
- [11] 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.

[12] Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940): Russian revolutionary, politician and statesman. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by Stalin's order.

[13] Zinoviev-Kamenev triumvirate: After Lenin's death in 1924 communist leaders Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the Party in 1927. They recanted, and were readmitted, but had little influence. In 1936 Zinoviev and Kamenev, along with 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

[14] 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.

[15] On May, 9 - The Great Patriotic War ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945. This day of a victory was a grandiose and most liked holiday in the USSR.

[16] 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'.

[17] 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.

[18] Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971): Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

[19] Twentieth Party Congress: At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

[20] Birobidzhan: Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidjan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.