

# Irina Lopko

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Chernigov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Orlikova

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*Irina Lopko is a well-known person in the Jewish community of Ukraine: she was head of Hesed in Chernigov for many years. Now she is a pensioner. She had a surgery recently and is on the way to recovery. Irina lives with her husband in a small two-bedroom apartment on the first floor of a 5-storied house, khrushchovka [1](#) built in the 1960s. There is a quiet green yard near the house. Their apartment that was recently repaired is also quiet and cozy. There are many books in their apartment. There are Russian and Ukrainian classical books and many books on the Jewish history. There are bookmarks in some of them. This means their owner works with them. There are cushions in nice knitted pillowcases on the sofa. Irina is fond of knitting. There is nice crockery in the cupboard and beautiful pictures on the walls. There are two beautiful gobelin pictures on the walls: this is the memory of her mother. There are many items with Jewish symbols on them. One cannot resist the charm of this lady. She is very friendly. One cannot help enjoying working with her. During our interview Irina's acquaintances dropped by to ask her how she was feeling. Someone gave her a bouquet of flowers through the window. Later Irina's husband Stanislav came home and began to set the table for dinner. They always invite their guests to share a meal with them. This is what they are used to.*

*I saw Irina again two months after the interview in Kiev institute of social and community workers. She is as full of new plans as usual and as friendly as we know her. Now she shares her experience with heads of Heseds and other Jewish organizations. She is a great authority among them.*

[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

## My family background

All my maternal and paternal ancestors were born in this green town of Nezhin on the Ostyor river in Chernigov region in about 100 km from Kiev. My mother and father's families always supported each other at hard times and were friends. There was Ukrainian and Russian population in Nezhin and there were numerous Jewish and Armenian communities. The Greek community was the biggest. Greek merchants were the richest. In 1815 one of three Russian lyceums was established in Nezhin. This was a school for the children of nobility. Later, during the soviet regime, a Pedagogical College was formed on the basis of this lyceum. Nezhin was not within the Pale of

Settlement [2](#), but there were many Jews in the town before the revolution. They lived among other nationalities. There were three synagogues in the town.

My maternal grandfather Isroel Silin's family had many children like all other Jewish families. My grandfather was born in 1881. He owned a small haberdashery store in the center of the town. He worked alone purchasing and selling his goods. My grandfather was an educated man. He always had some club gatherings at home and my mother laughed that my grandfather was a member of Bund [3](#), and my grandmother was a member of another Jewish party and they always had arguments at home. They were a religious family. My grandfather's friends were religious Jews who finished a yeshivah school like my grandfather. My grandfather also studied in a grammar school. The family observed all traditions and my mother knew about all holidays. My grandfather died at the age of 44 (in 1925), leaving his widow with six children. After he died the family did not observe traditions any longer, but my grandmother remained religious for the rest of her life.

My grandmother Basia, born in 1886, was a religious woman for her time. She studied in a grammar school, but I don't know whether she finished it. She was religious and observed all Jewish traditions and customs. They followed kashrut strictly and lit candles on Friday before Saturday. There was a Ukrainian cook who knew Jewish cuisine well in the house. My mother could make Jewish food and I learned from her. We didn't make traditional gefilte fish, for example, but we stewed it with vegetables (carrots, beetroots and onions), cooked beans in a specific manner and made chicken stew with stuffed necks. They often made strudels and pudding with honey and poppy seeds. My grandmother spoke Yiddish in the family, but she could speak fluent Russian and knew Ukrainian like everybody else in Nezhin. My grandmother was interested in politics and read books and newspapers. It's hard for me to tell about her political preferences before the revolution of 1917 [4](#), but I know that she was interested in Jewish movements and parties. My grandmother wore clothes that were in fashion in the early 20th century. She wore her hair popped up and she always went out with a hat on, which wasn't based on her religious convictions, but was a trend of the time. It was improper for ladies of all religions to go out without a hat.

After my grandfather died most of the children moved to Moscow looking for a better life and they took my grandmother there. She tried to observe at least main traditions living with her children in Moscow. She asked them to make her a special dinner on Saturday and when her son died she demanded to have him buried in the Jewish cemetery according to traditions. She didn't go to the synagogue, but she gave those who were going to the synagogue some money to order memorial prayers for her gone dear ones on her behalf. When she evacuated during the Great Patriotic War [5](#) to Petropavlovsk in Northern Kazakhstan she was desperate that there was no place to order prayers. We continued lighting candles on a memorial day in our family. She celebrated all holidays and when there was no way to have a celebration she always remembered about a holidays and observed at least what she could. She taught her children to be this way. They were far from religious prejudices, but they always remembered they were Jews. My grandmother passed away in Moscow in 1973. Her daughters looked after her until she died. They buried her in the Jewish section of a town cemetery.

My grandfather and grandmother Silin had seven children. The children were born every year and a half. The oldest girl Mehama was born in 1905. She studied in a grammar school and in 1917, at the age of 12 she died of an infectious disease.

Then my mother Fania Silin was born in 1907. She also studied in grammar school for few years and she often recalled this time in her life. Here is an episode from her school life: on a Christian holiday all children lined up to come to a priest to kiss his hand. My mother knew she couldn't do it and if she did her mother wouldn't let her enter her home. She worried a lot when her class tutor came to her rescue. She said 'Jewish girls won't kiss the hand'. In the future she bowed when she saw a priest, but she didn't kiss his hand. My mother did very well at school, but in 1818 the grammar school was closed and later it was reopened to be a labor school. My mother continued studies in an accounting school. After the Great Patriotic War my mother finished extramural Moscow Financial College.

The third daughter Olga (her Jewish name was Golda) was born in 1909. She also studied in grammar school few years. After school she moved to Moscow where she went to work as a draftswoman at a plant. She married Ziam Alpershtein, a nice Jewish guy, a worker. They received a room in a communal apartment [6](#) where their daughter Lena was born. In summer 1941, at the very beginning of the war, Ziam perished at the front. Olga died in Moscow at the age of 44. Their daughter Lena worked at a post office. She passed away in Moscow in 1998.

The next daughter Manya was born in 1911. She followed into her sister's steps moving to Moscow. She became a highly qualified marker at a plant. Her husband Nikolay Zaitsev was a highly qualified worker. He came from Klin in Moscow region. They said that when Nikolay married my aunt Manya his father came to visit them from Klin. He asked Nikolay 'Son, there are no icons in your room. How am I supposed to pray?' and Nikolay replied 'Father, I have a Jewish wife. We do not pray'. The old man was full of respect. He said 'Jews are special and important people. There was a Jewish pharmacist in our town: he was a well-respected person'. The Russian son-in-law respected my grandmother very much and she lived with them. Regretfully, Manya had an invalid baby. She spent all her time looking after the child, but the child died. Manya was a housewife. She also took care of my grandmother. Manya died in 1978.

My grandmother's favorite son Avraam, born in 1912, was a very decent, smart, talented and a very handsome man. He worked as a joiner at the same plant in Moscow where his sisters were working. He met his future wife Frieda at the plant. Avraam died of some infectious disease in 1929. They have lived only a few months together, unfortunately, they did not have children. This was a terrible loss for his family and for the collective of the plant. My grandmother never recovered from this tragedy.

My mother's sister Rieva, born in 1913, didn't complete her education. She followed her sisters moving to work in Moscow. She was a draftswoman and later she went to work at the aviation plant where she worked at the design office. Her husband Ruvim Gitiz, a Jewish man, worked at the same plant. Rieva was called with the Russian name [7](#) Rita (Jewish names were not popular at the time.) I don't think they had children. She died in Moscow about 10 years ago.

Malka, the last one, born in 1915, followed her sisters to Moscow. She worked as technician at a big plant. She met her husband Polosin at the plant where he was an engineer. He was Russian. The Silin family were very proud of Malka. She was a champion of Moscow in swimming. Malka died in 2002.

The sisters were very close. They spoke Yiddish, cooked for holidays, always celebrated holidays together and supported each other. Although they moved to Moscow when they were young they kept their identity of provincial Jews from Nezhin.

My grandfather Mindel's branch of the family originated from Lithuania. Our ancestors moved to Nezhin in the late 18th century and we don't know any relatives in Lithuania. Grandfather Simon Yankel Mindel was a shoemaker. He was born to the family of Moisey Mindel, a shoemaker in Nezhin, in 1874. He kept hitting his little hammer sitting on a small shoemaker's stool all his life. My grandfather was very religious. He was a senior man at the synagogue and the Jewish community of the town respected him very much for his honesty. He was a wise and reserved man. My grandfather Simon Yankel sang beautifully. He was a tenor and sang at the synagogue. Now I understand that he was a cantor. I remember my grandfather singing children's songs in Yiddish. One of them was about a tailor singing a song and his needle followed his song. Sometimes he sang Ukrainian songs. He didn't know any Russian songs. My grandmother had strong will and was a very determined woman and my grandfather always obeyed her.

I often recall my paternal grandmother. I took from her all human values that I have. My grandmother Masia was born to the dynasty of butchers named Lempert in Nezhin in 1878. They were not just butchers. They purchased cattle across the province, slaughtered it in Nezhin and then sold meat in their shop. My grandmother was a butcher. She cut meat in her shop and then sold it. She had housemaids to help her with housekeeping. She observed traditions, lit candles on Friday and cooked a substantial kosher dinner. My grandmother adored her husband who sat there hitting his hammer while she was the breadwinner. She gave birth to eight children: three daughters and five sons, whom she was very proud of and adored them.

In 1919, when my grandmother was 40 years old, my grandfather's brother Haim Isif Mindel came from the front of the Civil War [8](#). He had typhoid. She isolated him from her family and shut herself in a room with him to nurse him. She brought him to recovery and died saving her husband and children's lives. They survived. She was the only one who passed away. The rich and the poor of the town took part in the procession following her casket at her funeral. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery. All beggars and handicapped came to the funeral. She always helped and supported them. My father worshipped his mother.

My grandfather was very religious and was to remarry according to the rules. Four months later a shadkhan sent him to another town where he met a Jewish woman, a widow with four children. Her name was Miriam. She was big and beautiful. She suffered from diabetes. The children got along well and we all loved her. We called her 'grandmother' and she loved us, too. Only my father was devoted to his mother. It upset him that she slept in his mother's bed and he also saw her wearing his mother's shawls. Everything she said or did exasperated him. In 1919, when my father turned 18 he overtook responsibility for the family. My father joined his Lempert uncles' business. I remember Barko Lempert, a huge fat man. He always spoke Yiddish using many Ukrainian words.

The most wonderful and close of my grandmother's relatives was her tiny sister Haya. She didn't have any children of her own and she just adored her deceased sister's children. When she was very old and had poor sight my father always gave her money when they met. He gave her all he had at such moments. And their meetings were all alike. My father said 'Hallo, grandmother Haya'. She pretended she didn't recognize him and replied 'Hallo, and who are you?' My father had a

sense of humor and continued her game 'Well, then if you don't know me, may I bid you good bye'. Haya screamed 'Don't go, you tramp!' fearing that he wouldn't give her an allowance. Another thing about Haya: when a relative visited Nezhin my father harnessed a horse and took the family to the grave of grandmother. Haya approached her sister's grave and said 'Masia, can you hear me?' My father said from behind 'Yes, Haya, I hear you'. She turned and said 'Shut up, you tramp. Do not let him spoil the whole thing'. And she started again 'Masia, hallo, can you hear me? Here is this and that one. They've come here. Of course, David brought them here. David is a graf ('count' in Russian). His wife Fania is a real grafinia ('countess' in Russian) and they've brought two grafinchiki [Editor's note: this is a word game. 'Grafinchiki' means 'water bottle' in Russian], so she reported standing by the grave. On the way to the cemetery my father was trying to persuade Haya: 'Haya, please don't act like this', but it was impossible to stop her. She used to say about my father's younger brother Pyotr: 'Your son is a pilot, He is your 'little finger', he is so famous'. He was 24 at that time and he was a lieutenant and was not famous yet. She said 'You will be proud of him and the whole country will know him, the whole 'mishpukha'. She loved and cared about her nephews, Masia's children.

Unfortunately, all I know about my father's brothers and sisters is what he told me. They kept in touch and visited one another. I know that they were not religious and they did well in life. I have no contacts with their children.

My father's older sister Lisa (her Jewish name was Livsha), born in 1899, was a terrific person. She married Solomon Levin, a Jewish man. Before her marriage she knew she would never have children like Haya and her fiancé knew about it, but he married her anyway. He loved her so. Solomon perished at the front and Lisa remarried twice. She over lived two husbands. She moved to USA with the children of her third husband in the 1990s. She died at an elderly people's home there at the age of almost 100 years. She was a nice lady, very sweet and pleasant and everybody loved her.

The next sister Sima, born in 1900, was lame from birth. She was amazingly smart and attractive. Yevsey Levin, Lisa husband Solomon's brother, a Jewish man, very handsome, had to compete with other men to marry Sima, so beautiful and smart she was regardless of her handicap. They moved to Moscow where they both worked at a plant. They named their daughter Masia after my grandmother. During the Great Patriotic War Yevsey had an affair with a young girl at the front. He didn't even think of leaving his family, but aunt Sima didn't forgive him: she cut him off once and forever. After the Great Patriotic War Sima and her daughter stayed in Moscow. Sima died at the age of 74. She went to the kitchen to have a glass of kefir when her daughter was at a concert. She fell with this glass and died. Her daughter was smart and educated. He was an economist. She moved to USA in the 1980s. She died in New York.

My father David Mindel, born in 1901, was the oldest of his brothers. He was tall and swarthy and had fair eyes, but everybody thought he had dark eyes. My father went to cheder while the rest of his brothers studied in a Soviet Jewish school.

After my father uncle Shaya (Esaih) was born in 1905. He was different from my father. He could sing and dance well. When he was young he used to run away to gypsies. He loved women and they loved him. He was a cattle dealer and at times he got engaged in swindling and put in prison. The family was sort of ashamed of him. After his last time in prison Shaya changed dramatically.

He became very religious and reserved and led a very quiet life. In his last years of life Shaya was head of the Jewish community in Nezhin. He made arrangements for funerals. Shaya died in Nezhin at the age of 86. His two daughters live in Los Angeles, USA, and his son lives in Nezhin.

The next two children had one date of birth written in their birth certificate, but they weren't twins. My grandfather was too lazy to go register his baby and waited until another was born a year later. He registered a brother and a sister at the same time. So it happened that Rosa and Yuzik were like twins, though they were not born at the same date. Rosa was born in 1908 and Yuzik was born in 1909. Aunt Rosa was a professional singer. She had a dramatic soprano, a very strong voice. It was too loud to listen to her singing in a room. She studied in a music school that taught all soloists of the Bolshoi Theater [9](#) and she entered it without any problems. She also danced beautifully and wanted to sing in musical comedy, but her voice fit in opera well. Her first husband was from Dagestan. He was a Party member, but she was his fourth or fifth wife. It was impossible to live with him. He was a despot and she ran away from him. She returned to Moscow and was in hiding there. This Dagestanian man happened to be terribly jealous and promised to kill her. Once in Moscow Rosa met her acquaintance from Nezhin Nikolai Zhuravlyov. He was Russian. He had finished a college and was to go to work in Kursk. He had been in love with Rosa for a long time and proposed to her right away. A few days later they arrived in Kursk. Some time later he became director of a factory and Rosa organized a choir of Russian folk songs. She became its director and a soloist. She frequently got invitations from the best choirs in Moscow, but she didn't want to stay away from her husband and refused these job offers. It was her dream to form a Jewish choir. She and her husband moved to Lipetsk. He was director of a big plant. He was a wonderful person. During the Great Patriotic War he was a private at the front. Rosa died in Moscow in 1987. Her only son Vladimir Zhuravlyov lives in Moscow. We are friends.

Yuzik, born in 1909, worked as a joiner in Moscow. He had a Jewish wife. During the Great Patriotic War he was at the front like all brothers. He lost a leg at the front. After the war he worked with logistics. He became obese and suffered from asthma. He died in Moscow in 1973. His son Mikhail lives in Moscow.

My father's next brother Mikhail, born in 1911, studied in a Jewish school and served in the Navy. Only tall and athletic young men were selected for this service. There is a family legend related to Mikhail's service on a cruiser. The legendary military commander Voroshilov [10](#) visited his cruiser and there was an amateur concert. Mikhail sang wonderfully. He was a tenor like grandfather. He sang a Jewish song at the concert. Voroshilov liked the song very much. He asked 'Is it a gypsy song?' 'No', said uncle Mikhail, 'it's a Jewish song'. Voroshilov gave my uncle a guitar. He kept it for many years, but it was lost during the Great Patriotic War. The family tried to persuade Mikhail to study music and singing, but Mikhail didn't have education and he was used to manual work. In his employment record book he had only one entry working as a car mechanic in a garage in Moscow. Like his five brothers Mikhail was in the army during the Great Patriotic War. He served on the 'Road of Life' [11](#). He supervised transportation of half-dead people from Leningrad. He had awards for his service. Mikhail had a Russian wife. I don't remember her name and I don't know whether they had children. Mikhail died of cancer at the age of 60 in 1971.

The family was very proud of my father's younger brother Pyotr (Jewish name Pinia), born in 1913. He studied in the Soviet Jewish School in Nezhin. At the age of 16 he moved to Moscow where he worked at a plant and later entered an Air Force School. Uncle Pyotr was a pilot and in July 1941 he



was awarded an Order of Lenin [12](#) for a heroic deed. He was a hero, but he was a humble person and didn't like talking about his heroic deeds. After the great Patriotic War he finished Military Academy and served in civil aviation. He flew across the country in emergency situations. He had many awards. He was a very decent and interesting man. He was the most educated of Mindel brothers. Pyotr's wife Yelena was Russian. She lived in Moscow. She merged with our family and adopted all our traditions like nobody else. She had a good voice and sang Jewish songs. It was funny when Yelena started Jewish songs at our family gatherings. She didn't know Yiddish, but she learned lyrics of Jewish songs. Pyotr died a sudden death from a heart attack when he was on vacation in Yevpatoriya. He was 67. His daughter Tamara was an aviation design engineer in a design institute in Moscow.

In this big family my father David always had a deciding word since he was the oldest son. My father was well shaped and strong. When a circus came on tour into the town my father's relatives tried to persuade my father to stay aside from its performances. My father gave his word, dressed up and went to the circus. When wrestlers came onto the stage and invited volunteers from the audience to take part in their performance the audience began to call 'David! David!' and my father went onto the stage against his relatives' objections. He often won. My father used to say that he had an incomplete lower education. He was a cattle driver since childhood and he even had a certificate of 'cattle driver'. Later he became a cab driver when he met my mother.

My parents met when standing in line to pay fees: my mother came to pay a fee for her dying father and my father came to pay tax for his horses. My mother didn't have enough money and my father came and said 'I will pay for you'. She was confused. My mother was tiny and shy. She asked 'How do I pay you back?' and he replied 'I will find you'. My mother studied in an accounting school and other boys she knew were not at all like my father. He was a big man with a whip (now they have keys from their cars with them, but at that time they had to take their whips with them) and he made a great impression on my mother. My mother told her friends about this man. She didn't know how he would find her. Everybody knew Mindel brothers in Nezhin. When there were girls on the beach they used to gallop their horses into the river. They were athletes and absolutely adored horses. Once my mother was dancing at a party in her accounting school when her friends said 'Fania, there is a man standing in the doorway gazing at you. He looks like the one you described'. My mother looked back. It was him, but he disappeared. After the party my mother went out and my father stopped her. He said 'Hallo, I've come to pick the debt'. She felt confused again. She never had any money. He said 'In that case marry me'. My mother and her friends burst into laughing and got on his sledge. There was no space left for my mother and then my father grabbed her with his hand and put her on the seat beside him wrapping her in his winter coat. My mother recalled later 'I felt like fainting. I thought I could ride in his embrace for the rest of my life'. Such was a beginning of this great love. My mother's father died shortly afterward. Her father died young and my mother told me later that she had my father in her dreams, although he kept his distance, but she already was tying her life to his. After the funeral he took all children home on his wagon. He took responsibility for their family.

They got married a year later in 1826. I know for sure that there was a chuppah on their wedding. It was customary for the time that bridegrooms borrowed somebody else's clothes for a wedding. My father had someone else's coat on to have better looks. This was the coat of Yevsey, my father's sister Sima's husband. When it was over my father was looking for his coat. My mother

whispered to him: 'David, you've come wearing Yevsey's coat and he left in yours'. They often recalled this episode laughing.

## Growing up

I was born in 1931. I was their second child. Their first girl died of some disease at the age of three and a half years. I was a white-skin baby with no eyelashes. I was very quiet. Before I was born my parents rented apartments in various parts of the town, but when I was born they bought a house in the center. It was a big house that belonged to a landlord in the past. As I understand now they bought it almost for nothing. This house was bought for three families: my grandfather Mindel, our family and my father sister Sima's family. Sima and her family moved to Moscow some time later and our family lived in this house until my father died. I was brought to this house from the maternity hospital where I was born. I was named Sarra after my maternal grandfather Isroel. These two names sound similar. My grandfather Mindel insisted on giving me this name. He respected my mother's father who had died by then very much. He saw that I wasn't a pretty baby and to console my mother he said: 'The girl looks very intelligent'.

My mother often recalled the period of hunger in the early 1930s [13](#), there was nothing to eat and they ate potato peels and other junk food, but my mother had a lot of breast milk and she breastfed me until the age of two. My mother had sufficient milk to breastfeed another baby. He was a Ukrainian boy from a dispossessed family [14](#) of Petriks who lost their home. My parents gave shelter to a few dispossessed families and they were grateful to my parents for the rest of their lives. I was very fat in my childhood and everybody thought I was swollen from hunger. My mother always said: 'I survived the periods of hunger in 1931-1932 and during the war and I don't want to be hungry ever again'. When the period of famine was over my father took a cow into the house and it stayed with us until the end of his life. It was a deity of the family. The family worshipped it and we had a housemaid who milked the cow. If the housemaid was away my father put on her apron and kerchief to milk the cow. My mother never came close to the cow. She was a softie and my father never allowed her to do physical work to preserve her appearance.

My brother Yefim was born in 1936. I remember sitting on my mother's lap and she had such a big belly and there was something stirring inside. Then this crying and screaming nubbin came into the world. He was big and beautiful. Eight days later my brother was circumcised. I remember this well. The baby was whining there were old people around him doing something to him and I was very worried and horrified thinking that they might harm this little baby and they were trying to calm me down.

Something happened in 1936. This incident made me grow mature and feel for the first time in my life that we were Jews and that we were different from all others. My mother went to work two months after Yefim was born. She was a highly qualified accountant. She worked all her life. My parents hired a Ukrainian girl from a village to look after the baby. She also helped my father to look after the cow and milk it. My father's stepmother looked after the whole household. All of a sudden this girl disappeared on the eve of Pesach. My father contacted her family, but she was not there either. Her sister came from the village, we searched for the girl, but she was not found. She was missing for three days. The whole town came to our yard. My father and grandfather were sitting on a bench and there were militiamen beside them on both sides. Actually, they were about



to take my father and grandfather to prison. There was a rumor that they killed the girl to make matzah. People were yelling 'They always kill girls to add their blood into matzah'. We had never heard anything like that before. The girl's brothers didn't say anything. They kept looking for her. They looked in the river. This river was sparrow knee deep. Other people held torches for them and they searched the bottom with hooks. She was found suddenly. It turned out that she suffered from mental disorders since childhood. She suddenly fell into depression and then she found shelter where she could sleep for days. She removed a plank in the chicken house and slept there, warm and healthy, all in her urine. She was taken to hospital. There was one ward for patients with mental diseases in the hospital in Nezhin. Her sister replaced her and stayed with us until the war. Everything ended well, but we had a bitter aftertaste. We faced anti-Semitism. I kept asking 'Who was killed when matzah was to be made?'. I couldn't get rid of this horror for a long time.

My grandfather and grandmother Mindel only spoke Yiddish. I visited them for a cup of tea after kindergarten every day and they spoke Yiddish in my presence and once my grandmother commented 'I think she understands' and I nodded my head 'Yes, yes, I understand'. Then my grandmother and grandfather began to speak Yiddish to me and I enjoyed talking with them in Yiddish. There we sat at the table having tea and jam, my grandfather on my right and my grandmother on my left quietly talking in Yiddish. My grandfather taught me everything Jewish I know: Jewish songs, traditions, dishes, Jewish warmth and Jewish soul. Matzah was made in his home and Jews got together to pray in his home when there were no synagogues left in the town after the Great Patriotic War as a result of titanic efforts [15](#) of the Soviet regime.

We always had housemaids before the war. My mother worked a lot as deputy chief accountant of the municipal trade department. This was a very important position. In late 1930 my father also changed his job. I liked the horse smell in our house, but my mother rebelled against his profession. However, my father adored horses and went to work as horse dealer at a military registry office. My father was responsible for providing horses for the needs of the army and he often went on business trips. Every spring he went to military camps where he stayed through summer.

Arrests in 1937 [16](#) did not reflect directly our family, but my father had adamant anti-Soviet ideas. He could speak out his ideas and my mother was very concerned about his safety. There was fear in our family when my mother was interrogated about Ms. Grudina when my father was in a military camp. My mother said she didn't know anything about the woman. Nothing good or bad, although she actually knew this woman very well, she was our neighbor. I do not know in what she was guilty and what incriminated to her. My mother was kept there until morning. My grandfather was waiting for her sitting on the bench. My mother always mentioned this bench where grandfather waited for her 24 hours without any food or water worrying about her. He said 'Fania, if they arrest you I will come there in the morning to tell them to take me instead. David will not forgive me if they arrest you'. My mother recalled that when she came home my grandfather couldn't stand up from the shock, although he was not old then. Later this Ukrainian woman about whom my mother was interrogated was arrested anyway.

I went to school in 1939. There were no Jewish schools left in Nezhin by then and I went to a Russian school. My mother always wanted to give me good education. I studied German with a governess and had music classes at home. My grandmother and grandfather taught me Yiddish. I did very well at school. I had all excellent marks and I and my friend Yasha, a Jewish boy, were the

best in our class. There were many Jewish children in my class. I was a very quiet child. My first teacher who also knew my mother since grammar school used to say 'Why doesn't she speak louder? How will she live?'

### During the war

I remember some vague alarm that everybody felt at the beginning of war on 22 June 1941. My father was immediately called to the army. Before he left he managed to make some arrangements for my mother to go to work at the military hospital. She worked as an accountant and document assistant. My father thought it was better this way and he was right. The hospital evacuated to Astrakhan [a town in Russia in 1200 from Moscow where the Volga flows into the Caspian Sea] and we evacuated with this hospital leaving our home and belongings. Our housemaid took our valuables to her home in a village. We had beautiful carpets and old gobelin pictures. She kept them in a cellar where the carpets got rotten. The pictures were all right and I have them in my apartment now. Our dog, a beautiful pedigree spitz, perished. Germans killed it. They knew who the dog belonged to. They said 'Jude' and killed it.

In Astrakhan we were accommodated in an apartment. My mother wasn't on military service, but she wore a uniform with no badges of rank. On 1 October 1941 I went to school and my brother went to a 24-hour kindergarten. There was one such kindergarten for evacuated children whose mothers had to work long hours. At that time I faced anti-Semitism again, although there were no Jews in Astrakhan before the war and there could be no roots for local anti-Semitism. We lived in a terrible neighborhood for exiled enemies of the Soviet regime. They were mainly former kulaks and wealthy families from Ukraine. Their anti-Semitism went back to pogroms in the 1910s [17](#). Their children must have told their parents that there was a girl with a very strange name of Sarra [Editor's note: Jewish names were targets of mockery, vulgar jokes and abuse at the time]. Their parents probably explained what it was about and they beat me brutally saying that they were beating me for being a 'zhydovka parchataya' [kike]. I was a weird child. I was very quiet and never fought back. I came home and told my mother: 'Mom, take it easy, but I shall never go to school again and I shall never go out to play with children'. I didn't go to school for a year. Teachers from school came to talk me out of it and commissar of the hospital came to talk with me, but I didn't change my mind.

About half a year passed when the owner of the apartment Lutikova said: 'I am so lucky that you are not Jews. Other apartment owners have Jewish tenants'. Actually, 75% of hospital employees were Jews. My mother slept overnight and in the morning she packed and said: 'I need to tell you that I am a Jew'. The hospital sent a truck to pick us and we moved to the hospital. I didn't go to school. I studied at home, helped in the hospital, did housework and went to help an old woman, our neighbor, to water her vegetable garden and she gave us vegetables from her garden. I remember that this old lady gave me five apples on my birthday.

In autumn 1942 there were frequent bombings of Astrakhan. There were oil tanks burning around. Fuel was shipped to the front from Astrakhan. It was not safe to stay there. My father's brother Pyotr was commanding officer of a squadron and teacher at a pilot school after he was wounded. The school was in the Ural, in Chkalovsk town (present Orenburg) in 2000 km from Kiev. He sent us documents to move to him. I remember that we traveled across the Caspian Sea on a bare to Gurievsk in 720 km from Astrakhan and from there we took trains to get to Orenburg. We stayed

with uncle Pyotr's family and my mother went to work as accountant.

Here was the issue of my going to school again. I said: 'I am not going to school'. Pyotr's wife Yelena had a strong character. She attacked my mother 'What kind of a name is this? Sarra is written on all fences. This doesn't make other children feel friendlier'. She asked me 'What name do you like?' and I said 'Irina'. I knew Irina in my former school and she had such beautiful plates. Yelena went to school and said 'You've got the wrong name of a girl. Please change Sarra to Irina. Sarra is a mistake'. They changed my name and my family convinced me that nobody would know I was a Jew. I studied very well and got along well with my schoolmates. We received letters from my father and always waited for them. He was 40 when he went to the front. He had gout and after a year of service he was released from his front line service. He had lost many friends and grieved after them a lot. He was a great person with a great heart. He was very kind. He continued his army service as cattle supplier.

My mother corresponded with her former colleagues from hospital. By the end of 1943 the hospital moved to Taganrog, a Russian town on the border with Ukraine, in 800 km from Kiev. My mother got an offer to return to the hospital and she accepted it gladly. We returned to Nezhin in 1944. About this time my grandmother and grandfather returned from evacuation in Tatarstan. Our neighbors and acquaintances were happy to see us again, I recall. They helped us with food, although they didn't have much. I gratefully recall a bag of beans and some potatoes that our acquaintances brought from a village. There were Assyrian tenants living in our house since wartime and my grandfather thought it was not proper to make them move out. They lived in a wing of the house. It didn't make us very comfortable. They were noisy people with their own traditions, but my grandfather and father were patient with them. I received my first lessons of humanity and tolerance. Nobody ever told them to get out.

Shortly after we returned, in 1944 my grandfather Mindel's second wife Miriam died of diabetic coma. The war was still on, our house was cold and she didn't survive. I remember her funeral in the Jewish cemetery. She was buried according to Jewish traditions. She was wrapped in white cloth. There were four planks, on top, at bottom and on each side and the cloth was wrapped around. I was terrified to see my grandfather doing this. Then men took this out of the house and then to the cemetery. I stayed at home. My grandfather then sat on the floor taking off his shoes and the others were cutting his clothes. There was no synagogue in Nezhin. On Friday and Saturday old men gathered in my grandfather's room to pray. Matzah was baked in our house and we, children, took part in the process. Then matzah flour was made from matzah and there were dishes with dumplings.

### **After the war**

My father returned in summer 1945. It is such happiness when the family is together. He continued his work as cattle supplier. He never joined the Party and had anti-Soviet convictions, but he had to keep this a secret from others. His stay in Germany at the end of the war convinced him stronger that he was right. He used to say 'How did we manage to win a victory, when there is such good order there and everything is such a mess here?' He felt happy when Israel was established in 1948. Everybody thought that we would move there right away knowing the attitudes in our family, but this was impossible to do and my father didn't dare. Graves were more important to him than anything else. It was his dream to get to a Jewish state. He was a real Jew.

My mother was an apologist of the landlord nobility way of life. She admired their education, culture and literature. She stressed that the Russian classical literature was created by the nobility. She hated it that all cooks, housemaids and laborers were trying to come to power. My mother hated their lack of culture, their manner of speaking. She was hurt by this lack of culture while they felt masters of this life.

In 1945 I fell severely ill with tuberculosis of glands. My relatives from Moscow took me to Moscow. I studied at school and stayed with my father brother Mikhail's family. All relatives took part in arrangements for my medical treatment. I was taken to an institute and then I was taken to a healer, an old man in Moscow region where I was to go once a week. I left school and missed almost a year of studies. I recovered and returned to Nezhin a year later. I went to school with another class. However, another severe illness began: psoriasis.

In 1946 a teacher of Hebrew named Ash came to our house. I don't have the slightest idea where my father found him. My father hired him for my brother. He was a poor man, one of emigrants from Russia. He came from America and somehow happened to arrive at the provincial town of Nezhin. Five other Jewish boys came to his classes in our house and he taught them by wonderfully beautiful books. My father arranged these classes for him since he wouldn't accept alms, but he had to support his ill wife. He taught the boys Hebrew and Yiddish, but my brother was no good at languages. The teacher used to say to my brother 'Fima, can't you hear one word when your parents talk?' and my brother replied 'I can, but talk so that I didn't understand anything'. Other boys were as dumb as my brother. Ash didn't accept money from widows' children. Then my father doubled his payment to keep this teacher working. Ash lived in Nezhin several years until he disappeared. Nobody knew where he went. When I was in Israel at the 65th birthday of my brother in 2001 I met rabbe Ash's former pupils. They spoke of him warmly. They remembered his first name, but I only remembered his last name of Ash.

When I returned from Moscow I became more active at school. I was an active pioneer and then Komsomol [18](#) member. I am a funny person. I yield to convictions. My parents were not quite happy with my fervor, but they didn't interfere. I became a leader at school. I was Komsomol organizer and chairman of the pupil's committee. I devotedly participated in all activities. I conducted Komsomol meetings speaking for better studies, was eager for our school to win the first place for gathering waste paper, convinced schoolchildren to join Komsomol and was responsible for admission. I quit music school where I was very successful for the sake of Komsomol. I studied brilliantly, but another period of wild anti-Semitism called 'struggle against rootless cosmopolites' [19](#) began. I remember cold suspicious attitudes of my classmates. There were few Jewish pupils in my class. Those girls and I felt something and tried to stay closer to one another. Many years later I analyzed why Jewish children are so active and study so well. Jewish children has always had a feeling of inferiority and they took every chance where their talents could develop.

I didn't have ant document proving that I was Irina. When I turned 16 my mother went to the passport office and said that her girl would have a terrible stress if they wrote the name of Sarra in my passport. She said I already got used to the name of Irina. Everybody knew and respected my mother. They knew that her daughter was Irina and that I had psoriasis. So nobody argued. They just wrote the name of Irina in my passport.

I finished school in 1950 and had huge plans. I was going to enter the Faculty of Philosophy and Children's Psychology in Moscow state University or Polygraphist College to study children's publication business. My parents knew where I was going and they also knew that it didn't make sense trying to make me change my mind. They were very worried. The family didn't have money to support me and they didn't want to let me go alone to cold Moscow where I would not have enough food. We heard rumors from Moscow that Jewish children were not appreciated in higher educational institutions. It was the period of struggle against cosmopolitanism. There was a very good Pedagogical College in Moscow. One day my parents came home and I said: 'I've submitted my documents to the Pedagogical College'. They were so happy. I passed all exams with '5' marks and was admitted. My specialty was Russian philology. I had problems with the Ukrainian language, but I studied it with such effort that before graduation I knew it perfectly.

In 1951 my grandfather passed away. My father arranged Jewish funeral for him, only there was no ceremony, but a casket, I don't know for what reason. There were older Jewish men at the funeral. My father and father's brother, those of them who managed to come to the funeral, were not supposed to walk after the casket and had to take another road to the cemetery. Again clothes were cut and the funeral prayer recited. This was another day when our family began to light candles.

In the early 1950s I studied in college. Since I had all excellent marks at the age of 18 I was photographed with Stalin's portrait on the background. I brought this picture home, but my father said: 'Throw away this photo'. He understood very well what was going on in the country and that Stalin was aware of everything and he was the one who issued orders. He often said 'Beast, what a beast'. The drama called 'doctors' plot' [20](#) was played in the country. Wonderful doctors who worked with us in the hospital didn't have patients any more. There was doctor Khizes. There were rumors in town that he instilled some throat diseases in his patients. This situation drove my father mad. My father said: 'Here, I told you he is a beast'. I hate those memories of this horror and all those terrible articles in newspapers.

There were few Jewish lecturers and students in our college. They pestered us at Komsomol meetings for little things. There were village wenches and demobilized military in their uniform coats and they couldn't forgive us for our successful studies and intelligence when they were dumb and uneducated. However, there were nice Ukrainian and Russian girls and teachers, but there were so few of them. I am sure that anti-Semitism is based on jealousy. I remember two senior Jewish students: Bishler and Braier. They were two years senior. They were intelligent and talented guys. They were criticized at every meeting. Once I spoke in their defense. Later they said that these 'zhydy' [kikes] were all the same. I was the best student. I liked studying and everything was interesting for me, including the Russian and Ukrainian languages and literature and there was nothing to reproach me with.

However, I was naive like everybody else and I believed in justice. When Stalin died in 1953 I thought I was going to die too. Life seemed to have stopped. My father felt different. He didn't say anything and one could see not joy, but gloating delight in his eyes. He was hoping that the chief's death would change the situation. It was true. Some time later talks about doctors came to an end.

When I was a student I became interested in the Jewish subject and began to make a log of outstanding Jewish people. I consulted assistant professor Polonski, a Jew. Then I became obsessed



with it. My acquaintances always called me when they wanted to find out information about Jews. Everybody knew that Irina knew everything about all Jews. I didn't keep it a secret that I collected information about Jews, but only Jews took interest in it. Polonski was fired from our college. He worked in Tyumen and sent me letters with new information.

I got married in 1953. I met my future husband at a Komsomol conference in Chernigov [200 km from Kiev]. His name was Boris Lopko and he was born in 1927. He studied in a technical college after serving in the army for seven years. In 1944 he was sent to the Far East. He had a hard life. His mother Mera Barkan was an assimilated Jew. His father Fyodor Lopko was Ukrainian. During the war Boris and his mother were in occupation. The burgomaster rescued her giving her a Ukrainian passport. He rescued several Jews. We met and I felt sorry that he had to serve seven years in the army and that his 20-year-old sister died and that he suffered so much in occupation. He was in love with me, but I was feeling sorry for him. His Jewish mother was not happy that her son married a Jewish girl. She feared everything Jewish and tried to conceal her Jewish identity. We registered our marriage in a registry office in Chernigov.

After graduation I taught the Russian language in a school in Nezhin for two years. On days off I traveled 90 km to my husband in Chernigov by bus. Boris worked as an electrician. Later I convinced him to enter extramural department of Polytechnic College in Chernigov. I helped him with his studies and did tests for him. When he received his diploma he said 'I can give you this diploma. It's yours', but I said 'Thanks, I already have one'. It was hard for us to be together. We were different people. He got irritated at my attachment to books and my inclination for going into the depth of things. During the period of anti-Semitism his instincts told him that it was better to conceal that he was a Jew and he never objected when somebody spoke against Jews. I was different and the first thing I said when meeting people was that I was a Jew.

There was a vacancy in a children's library in Chernigov and I appealed for it. I wanted to be with my husband in Chernigov. I worked in the reading hall first and later I became director of this library when my predecessor retired. I had to be on guard all the time: if a writer got arrested and there were articles in central newspapers we had to remove his books from our stocks. I had to enter the Party to keep this position and I did. It was a formal and routinely ceremony.

At first we lived with my husband's relatives in Chernigov. Later we rented an apartment. When our baby was due my husband worked as an engineer and received a nice room in a communal apartment in the center of the town.

Our son was born in 1957. We named him Fyodor. My husband's father died shortly before our son was born. He was a very nice person and we named the baby after him. About five years later my mother-in-law moved in with us. Life became unbearable and I left my husband taking my son with me. I received a room and later an apartment. I had a small salary and asked my acquaintances to find me a better job. I got an offer from a geological organization. I worked there as an editor for five years. I finished editor's training course. Later I went to teach at the Advanced Teachers' Training College.

My father was a very important person in my life. My life is divided into two parts: before and after my father died. When my father died in 1967 old Jewish men came to me and said: 'You must give your consent for us to make all necessary arrangements'. I replied: 'My father never went to the synagogue. I think you are wrong. My father wasn't really religious'. They said: 'Your father always



gave money to Jews and to the underground Jewish community'. If he met a money collector he gave his contribution and then when he met another he gave him money, too. It didn't matter whether he was hard up at the moment or not he knew that he had to make contributions to the community and that was it. Faithful Jews washed his corps and buried and recited a prayer. His colleagues and our Assyrian tenants came to the funeral, but faithful Jews played the main role. I couldn't allow my mother to walk 3 km to the cemetery alone, though. We were told to wear old clothes to the cemetery. They told us they were going to cut our collars. My brother and I did as we were told, although we were both communists.

After my father died I took my mother to Chernigov. She worked as an accountant until she turned 70. I was raising my son and my mother was helping me.

My brother Yefim finished a school of civil aviation in Moscow region. Later he worked as a technician in Vinnitsa, a regional town in Ukraine in 200 km from Kiev. There he married a lovely Jewish girl. However, he always missed me and wanted to live in my town. He moved to Chernigov where he served in a military school. He was promoted to the rank of captain. He has two children: daughter Arina and son Oleg. When Chernobyl disaster [21](#) happened in 1986 Arina prepared to move to Israel. In 1990 my brother and his family moved to Israel. My mother thought their departure was my father's dream coming true. She said: 'He couldn't move there in 1948. Now that he died let his son go there'. My brother's daughter is 43. She had divorced her husband before. She doesn't want to remarry. She lives for her child. In Haifa, Israel, my brother's wife and my niece learned Ivrit. My brother's wife taught mathematic in Ivrit for 11 years. Arina works as an office administrator in a legal advice office. My brother didn't want to study. He worked as a welder. My nephew moved to Eilat where he works in tourist business. He is very happy. My brother and his wife are pensioners. They have a good live and like Israel. They've bought an apartment facing the sea. I've visited them twice.

My son Fyodor graduated from the Faculty of Indo-European Languages in Kiev University. He is a Spanish and Portuguese translator. Now Fyodor owns a woodwork company in Moscow. He likes this business and is successful. He was married three times. There is something wrong with his marital life. His wives were non-Jewish. His older son David, named after my father, lives with his wife and mother in Kharkov [450 km from Kiev], and his 14-year-old daughter Dasha lives in Moscow. I hardly know her.

My son knows that he is a Jew. When I ask him: 'Who do you feel you are?' he replies "I am who I am'. He loves his relatives, our big family, but I didn't develop the love to Judaism and everything Jewish in him. My grandson David is different. After I retired at the age of 55 I raised him. Later he went to live with his mother in Kharkov, but he never forgot about me and visited me every time he got a chance. He often called and wrote me. We are very close. He even has absolute hearing and a wonderful voice taking after the Mindel branch of the family. Recently David married Lena, a lovely Jewish girl. Now we have another dearest creature: David's daughter, my great granddaughter Katia. She is only 2.5, but I can tell that she understands me completely. David and Katia live in Kharkov. They often come to see me on holidays and days off.

Over 20 years ago I met my current husband Stanislav Martynenko, born in 1935. When we met I was eager to keep or acquaintance, but I said: 'I am a Jew and you must think about it'. He didn't think. He just said he loved me and didn't care about it. We registered our marriage and began to

live together. Stanislav is a box trainer, a champion in the past.

His first family is in Kharkov. His first wife took every effort to separate the children from him. My grandson and granddaughter love him. He married me when little David was with me. His mother feared that he might marry a woman with small children and when little David and I came to meet her she almost fainted seeing my grandson. Stanislav said: 'Mother, you've always told me about a woman having small children, but you never mentioned grandchildren'. He has a terrific sense of humor.

Beginning from 1986 I dedicated myself to my family looking after my mother, my mother-in-law and raising my grandson. I lived the life of a pensioner. My mother had a poor heart. She died before Pesach in 1992. There was a prayer recited at her funeral. Not many people in town did this. There was a Jewish community formed in Chernigov. Chairman of the community was looking for a place to celebrate the holidays. He came to me and said: 'The best memory of your mother would be if we start preparations for Pesach here'. We prepared everything for Pesach and celebrated it in my apartment without hiding. This was the first Jewish holidays celebrated in Chernigov after many years of oblivion. There was something subconscious in me. I began to read about it and I read about commandments, it was such a discovery for me. There is an inner voice in people and I was proud of my Jewish identity, but I wasn't aware what exactly I was proud of. When I began to read more I opened a whole world for me. We've always had many books at home and we liked to give books as presents. My mother had a wonderful collection of books before the Great Patriotic War. She had many wonderful pre-Revolutionary books. During the war this collection was gone. I gave my son my collection of books that I collected after the war. Now I have another collection. I've always read a lot.

I was very happy and enthusiastic about perestroika [22](#). I believed in Gorbachev [23](#). If I ever liked any politicians at all he was the one. The independent Ukraine gave Jews an opportunity to develop our national self-consciousness. There were cultural and community centers opened. I liked it very much. Once I attended a seminar of the women's international association. There was a woman rabbi of progressive Judaism of USA. She said: 'Those of you who haven't had bat mitzvah can have it now and adopt Jewish names'. I decided to have my name of Sarra back. She had a form with an emblem. I was given the name of Sarra-Haya. This may seem a miracle, but I recovered from my diseases that I suffered from all the time when I was Irina. I understood that I haven't exhausted my potential yet. I became one of activists of the Jewish live in Chernigov. When my mother was ill I was terrified thinking 'How do women who have no daughters leave this life? If they have nobody who takes care of them?' My mother had friends who had nobody to help them. They were nice people. In 1996 Hesed was organized in our town with the help of Joint [24](#). I was offered to get involved in this. I met in Kiev with Yakov Blaich, a young rabbi, and we set priorities. He said we had to meet with old Jews. We talked with nurses and doctors in clinics to get information. We visited our first clients at home. We saw so much grief, diseases and poverty. I am a squeamish person, but suddenly I managed to overcome this. I found the love of people in me. I do not mean material support. Moral support and human dignity are of the utmost importance. My husband supported me in everything. He helped me to go through hard moments. My husband is my happiness. People around ask: 'How can he stand it all?' He was the first volunteer in Hesed. He delivered food products to old women, helped them and was patient and friendly. In the first years after Hesed was established we didn't have an office faculty. My mother's apartment was vacant

and we used this small two-bedroom apartment for the Hesed office. Nobody paid me for it. This was my contribution into tzdoka. Later, when Hesed acquired a nice new facility we made a storeroom in this apartment. Work as director of Hesed is complicated. There is a lot of pressure and it takes a lot of effort to work there, but it is a wonderful job. I met many interesting people and filled myself needed. I had a full life. I can say proudly that our Hesed was one of the best in Ukraine. We spent a lot of time to restore the Jewish cemetery. I was also involved in restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Nezhin where my father was buried. I've always thought that a cemetery is as important as everything else. We also installed a memorial gravestone at the place of mass shooting of Jews during the war. I spoke at a meeting. I was also involved in the establishment of a Jewish men's choir in Hesed. I always recalled grandfather Mindel and his sons singing when I listened to the choir.

Later I needed to have a surgery. I needed to have my hip joint replaced. I had a surgery in Kiev. I felt the warmth and care of my friends, employees of Hesed in Kiev. I had David's psalms with me before the surgery. I have my prayer. I was a public person and I didn't like it that people would see me lame, and I quit my position in Hesed. Now I learn to walk at home. I do not give up and have many plans. I have an idea of establishing a fund for the children who have no fathers and ill children. There is a synagogue I know in USA and a committee. They promised to help. I would also open a synagogue of progressive Judaism here. I've been a member of the community for ten years and always contribute the tenth part of my income to tzdoka. This corresponds to Jewish commandments.

I've visited Israel several times. I've been to synagogues. I've felt and fell in love with this country. I am eager to go to Israel. I see it my dreams. My husband also wants to go there, but I have the only son and I cannot part with him. Besides, we can only be pensioners in Israel while I have many plans here. It is very important to realize that people need you.

## GLOSSARY:

### **1 Khrushchovka**

Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in the new neighborhood of Kiev.

### **2 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

### **3 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

### **4 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.

### **5 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.

### **6 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.

### **7 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid

discrimination.

## **8 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.

## **9 Bolshoi Theater**

World famous national theater in Moscow, built in 1776. The first Russian and foreign opera and ballet performances were staged in this building.

## **10 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)**

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

## **11 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.

## **12 Order of Lenin - Established on April 6, 1930**

The Order of Lenin is the highest award given by the USSR for both military and civilian people and collectives. It is awarded for outstanding services to the revolutionary movement, labor activity, defense of the Homeland, and strengthening peace between peoples. The Order has been awarded over 400,000 times. Early issues of the Order (1930-1934) were made of silver followed by gold (1934-1936). Modern issues contain a platinum bust of Lenin surrounded by gold bands of wheat. Above the bust is a red enameled flag with Lenin's name in gold Cyrillic letters. The bottom of the Order contains the hammer and sickle in red enamel. The medal is suspended on a pentagonal device with a ribbon consisting of three 2mm stripes on the edges (yellow-red-yellow) and a center red stripe.

## **13 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.

#### **14 Kulaks**

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

#### **15 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.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 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.

#### **18 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.



## **19 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'.

## **20 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.

## **21 Official statistics in the USSR kept silent about the consequences of Chernobyl power plant disaster, especially the number of dying from oncological diseases**

The doctors had a classified direction to show in the documents that a patient died from other than oncological disease.

## **22 Perestroika**

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

## **23 Michail Gorbachev**

Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev was born on March 2, 1931 in Privolnoye, Stavropol province. He went to Moscow State University where he graduated in Law. Mikhail Gorbachev joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1952 and acted as First Secretary of Stavropol City Committee of Komsomol (1955-1958). He was later elected to the Central Committee of the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union as a Member in 1971. From 1978-1985 he served as Secretary of the Central Committee with responsibility for agriculture. From 1985 to 1991 Mikhail Gorbachev was the General Secretary of the Communist Party. He also served as Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet from 1970-1990 and acted as Chairman for the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Soviet of the Union in 1984-85. From 1985 to 1990 he was a Member in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, serving as its President (1989-1990). He served as President of the USSR in 1990-1991. Gorbachev stands for what he calls "democratic socialism" or "socialism with a human face". He currently heads the Gorbachev Foundation (since 1992), Green Cross International (since 1993), and the Civic Forum movement (since April 1996). In 1986, he introduced the radical reform policies of perestroika (restructuring), demokratizatsiya (democratization) and glasnost (openness).

## **24 Agro-Joint (American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation)**

The Agro-Joint, established in 1924, with the full support of the Soviet government aimed at helping the resettlement of Jews on collective farms in the South of Ukraine and the Crimea. The Agro-Joint purchased land, livestock and agricultural machinery and funded housing construction. It also established many trade schools to train Jews in agriculture and in metal, woodworking, printing and other skills. The work of Agro-Joint was made increasingly difficult by the Soviet authorities, and it finally dissolved in 1938. In all, some 14,000 Jewish families were settled on the land, and thus saved from privation and the loss of civil rights, which was the lot of all except for workers and peasants. By 1938, however, large numbers left the colonies, attracted by the cities, and most of those who stayed were murdered by the Germans.