

Laszlo Ringel

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Uzhgorod

Ukraine

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Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Laszlo Ringel is a short thin man. He wins my favor from first sight. He is friendly and sociable. He is an interesting conversationalist. Laszlo reads a lot and takes vivid interest in everything happening in the world. Though he cannot see with one eye, he draws a lot. There are his oil paintings on the walls and graphics of old buildings in Uzhgorod. I admired the figures he makes from intricately curved tree branches and roots. Laszlo lives in a two-storied house that the family built in the 1970-80s on the site where the Ringel family had their old house before WWII. It's a comfortable and cozy house with bright spacious rooms. Laszlo lives with his son Mihaly and his wife and Mihaly's daughter Yelena with her husband and two children. They love and care for Laszlo and he shares their feelings to him.

I didn't know my father's parents. They lived in Transylvania. It belongs to Romania now, but before WWI Transylvania was a part of Austro-Hungary [Trianon Peace Treaty] [1]. My paternal grandfather Manó Ringel was born in the 1860s, but I don't know where. All I know about my grandmother is that she died young, and that her name was Eszter, nee Feuerwerker. I don't know where exactly in Transylvania my parents' family lived or where he was born. My father Mór Ringel was born in 1881. There were few children in the family, but the only one I know was my father's sister Maria, who lived with our family for quite a while. Maria was few years younger than my father.

It's hard to say how religious my father's family was. My father and his sister were neologs [2]. They spoke Hungarian. My father must have finished a school well since he managed to enter the Trade Academy in Transylvania. There was no anti-Semitism and there were liberal attitudes toward Jews, but still there were some restrictions for Jews in educational institutions. [editor's note: There were no such restrictions in the Austro-Hungarian double monarchy. The interviewee probably refers to the numerus clausus law introduced in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1920 to limit the enrollment of Jews to higher educational institutions.] My father and grandfather served in the Austro-Hungarian army [KuK army] [3] during WWI. At that time men with secondary and higher education were promoted to officers' ranks in the army after having some short-term training, but this did not refer to Jews. The highest rank they could expect was a corporal. [editor's note: There were no such limitations in the KuK army and Jews were equal with non Jews in theory. However, for various other reasons, the military never became a typical Jewish career path.] The only exception was granted to doctors. They were not subject to this kind of restrictions. My grandfather Manó and my father were corporals at the front. I have two letters: one of those letters my mother wrote to my father in 1915, when he served in the Hungarian army at the front during WWI, and other one my father sent to my mother from the front in 1917. My grandfather also sent us letters from the front which she used to sign as Emanuel. [Mano is short for Emanuel in Hungarian.] My

grandfather Manó died in the 1930s. I don't know where he was buried. After my father got married his younger sister Maria followed him to Subcarpathia [4] where she lived with us. Maria was a dressmaker. She didn't marry for a long time. In the late 1920s Jonas, whose family name I do not remember, a Jewish man from Uzhgorod, proposed to Maria. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. Maria moved to Uzhgorod to live with her husband. Their only daughter Magda was born in 1930. In 1944 Maria and her husband were taken to the ghetto and from there to Auschwitz. Maria and her husband perished in the camp, but their daughter Magda survived. After WWII Magda, a young girl then, moved to Palestine with other young people. On the way there the ship they sailed on was captured by a British military ship, and all passengers were sent to a camp in Cyprus, a Greek island where Maria met her future husband, who was also kept in this camp. In 1948 they managed to move to Palestine. Magda got married in Israel. Her family name is Friedman. She lives with her family in Qiryat Yam and we correspond.

I knew well my grandfather on my mother's side Menyhert Bergida, who used to be called Menyus in the family. [Short for Menyhert] His Jewish name was Menahem. He was born in the 1850s. My grandmother died before I was born. She was called Betti Moskovits. I don't know where my grandparents were born. The Bergida family lived in the Uzh Valley in Subcarpathia. There as at least one name of Bergida in every village and they were somehow related. They were craftsmen: shoemakers and tailors, but the majority were tradesmen. My grandfather Menyhert owned a pot-house, an inn providing hot meals, drinks, accommodation and a shed for cattle in a village near Uzhgorod, called Onokovtse. During the Czech rule it was called Domanince Hroni, but during Austro-Hungary it's name was Felsodomonya. Onokovtse is a part of Uzhgorod now where people have cottages and dachas [summer house]. There were pot houses, taverns and restaurants in Subcarpathia. The difference between pot houses and taverns was that taverns served cold snacks and drinks while pot houses offered lunches and dinners. Besides, my grandfather also cured cattle in Onokovtse and surrounding villages. I don't know whether he studied to be a vet or he had a gift, but villagers always turned to him when they needed a vet.

Felsodomonya was an old village. The Roman Catholic church in the village was built in XIV century. It was a small village: 80% of its residents were Slovaks and the rest were Ruthenians. There were also few Russian Orthodox Christians, who had been captives during WWI and got married and stayed in the village. The Slovaks were Roman Catholics and Ruthenians were Greek Catholics. There were only 3 Jewish families and there were not even enough men for a minyan. On holidays, at the permission of the Mukachevo rabbi Spira [Chaim Elazar Spira, Rabbi of Munkacs from 1913 until his death in 1937.] went to pray in the prayer house in Nizhneye Domanintse. This village became a part of Uzhgorod in due time. The prayer house was a big one. There was a Jewish family living there. There were two rooms assigned for prayers in the house: one for men and one for women.

There was no anti-Semitism in Onokovtse during the Austro-Hungarian or Czech rule. Jews were respected in the village. Roman and Greek Catholics didn't get along and sometimes there were fights between them to prove whose belief had more truth, but it had nothing to do with Jews.

I wouldn't say there was no anti-Semitism in Austro-Hungary. However, it was far from anti-Semitism that developed when in 1938 Subcarpathia was annexed to Hungary. [Hungarian troops occupied Subcarpathia in March 1939. The western part where Ungvar/Uzhorod/Uzhgorod is was

attached to Hungary as early as the 2nd November 1938, together with Southern Slovakia as a result of the First Vienna Decesion.] We had a book at home published in Budapest in 1900. Its author Egon, regrestfully, I don't remember his last name and the title of the book, was an official in Subcarpathia for some time. He returned to Budapest and wrote a book of his impressions about life in Subcarpathia. In his book he called Jews petty tradesmen and wrote how they exploited the Ruthenians. I remember one example he gave: how a Jew leased a cow to a Ruthenian and when it had a calf he took the calf away. However, he forgot that at the beginning of his book he wrote that Ruthenians had no education and worked hard to make their living before Jews settled down in Subcarpathia, but then Egon writes that Jews came to live there and began to exploit the Ruthenians and this was not the only book of this kind.

Grandfather Menyhert was a neolog. My mother's family always celebrated Sabbath, lit candles, and the family got together at the table. However, my grandfather worked on Saturday like the majority of neologs. They celebrated Jewish holidays in accordance with traditions. They spoke Hungarian.

There were three daughters in the family. My mother Anna, Hanna in Jewish, was the youngest. She was born in 1885. The oldest was Karolina. I don't remember her Jewish name. Te middle sister was Rozsa, Reizl in Jewish. I don't know what education my mother and her sisters got, but I think it was a secondary school or grammar school. At least my mother helped me to do my homework when I studied in a grammar school. My mother's sisters were married. Karolina Braun, who used to be called Linka at home lived in Uzhgorod. I don't remember her husband. He owned a furniture shop and they were quite wealthy. Karolina had two sons, much older than me, Miklos and Sandor. Miklos worked in Budapest as a dentist. When he studied in Prague beforehand he changed his family name from Bran to Cerny. My mother's sister Rozsa Weiss and her family lived in [what is today] Slovakia, in the town of Kralovsky Chlmec. She also had two children: son Tibor, older than me, and daughter Edit, about the same age with me, who was called Editke in the family [diminutive of Edit]. Her husband owned a trade business. My aunts were housewives. Except for Tibor they were all killed in the Shoah.

My parents met and fell in love with one another before WWI. When my father studied in the Trade Academy, he came to Onokovtse for training in my grandfather Menyhert's pot house where my parents met. In 1914 my father went to the army and they corresponded till 1918. After the war my father went to Onokovtse and asked my grandfather's consent for marrying his daughter. My grandfather knew that they were corresponded and loved each other and he gave his consent. My father stayed in Onokovtse till the wedding. My grandfather arranged a traditional Jewish wedding for them. There was a chuppah in front of the pot house, and the rabbi from the Uzhgorod synagogue conducted the wedding ceremony. There was a big wedding party in the pot house. After the wedding my parents moved to Uzhgorod. My father worked as an accountant in 3 stores owned by Jews. My mother was a housewife.

My father had beautiful thick auburn hair. He didn't cover his head. He wore a hat in cold weather, but it had nothing to do with Jewish traditions. He wore suits in fashion of the time. In spring and summer he was fair-color clothes. My mother only wore a shawl to go to the prayer house. She had thick dark hair that she wore in a knot. My mother wore fashionable clothes and high-heeled shoes. My parents were neologs. They observed the main Jewish traditions and went to the synagogue on

holidays. We spoke Hungarian at home. My parents rented an apartment in a 3-storied house. I was born in Uzhgorod in 1920. I am called Laszlo, even today everybody calls me as such. When the Czechs came to Subcarpathia they made me Vladislav, when the Russians came they made me Vasiliy. I have three birth certificates in three different languages. [i.e. Hungarian, Czech and Russian] I was called Laci, Lacika, at home. [affectionate of Laszlo] My Jewish name is Leizer. I had a brit milah at the synagogue in Uzhgorod in accordance with the tradition. There was an entry made in the roster of the synagogue about this event.

In 1918 Subcarpathia was annexed to Czechoslovakia [First Czechoslovak Republic] [5]. [Subcarpathia was annexed to the newly created Czechoslovak state as late as June 4th 1920 by the Trianon Treaty.] Hungary was an agricultural country while Czechoslovakia, particularly the Czech lands [Bohemia and Moravia], were highly industrial. In about 20 km from Uzhgorod the Czechs built a chemical plant and a furniture factory. This factory manufactured furniture for export: for example, they manufactured chairs with folding seats for cinema theaters in America. They built a tobacco factory in Mukachevo [40 km from Uzhgorod, 660 km from Kiev]. They grew some tobacco in Mukachevo and imported the rest. Czechs also organized big wineries to export wine. There were also salt mines in Rakhov district in Subcarpathia where Czechs organized a resort. There are still salt baths there that are a wonderful cure for radiculitis. There is a health resort in the abandoned mines where the air is saturated with salt vapors and this is a great cure for respiratory organs. They also built a big brewery in Mukachevo. Resorts on mineral streams is also an accomplishment of the Czechs. Svaliava district of Subcarpathia was known for its mineral streams. This water was used to cure gastro enteric diseases. Czechs also exported bottled water to other countries, even to the USA. In the village of Vyshkovo in Khust district near the Romanian border Czechs built a health center by a mineral water stream for the cure of kidneys and liver, named 'Shayan', They also discovered a stream and built a health center near Mukachevo. This created jobs for many residents of Subcarpathia. Czechs built many comfortable houses. These houses are valued high even now. There was no anti-Semitism during the Czech rule. Vice versa, they supported and appreciated Jews promoting them to official posts. Jews were allowed to serve in the army and there were no restrictions as to the ranks. Many Jews studied in higher educational institutions. Local residents of Subcarpathia had always been loyal to Jews.

In 1922 my parents decided to move to Onokovtse. Grandfather Menyhert asked my mother to help him in the pot house. Onokovtse was in 5 km from Uzhgorod and my father could keep his job in Uzhgorod. My father bought an open carriage and horses to ride to work.

The building housing the pot house was 250 years old. It was a brick building with 1m thick walls. We also lived in the rooms of this house. There was an annex to the house where there was a food store. There was a big dinner room, a living room for parents and children where it was not allowed to smoke or drink, there was a room where one could play chess or cards and another room, something like a bar. The big room was often rented for weddings or birthday parties. There was a big kitchen in the building. Before my sister was born we lived in two rooms in the pot house: grandfather Menyhert in one and my parents and I in another. There was another building adjoining to the house. It was made from air bricks, a mixture of clay and straw. Air bricks are strong and warm. After WWI this house was a distillery where slivovitsa, a local plum brandy was produced. There were 2 m high, 1.5 m in diameter barrels in the cells: red plums purchased in surrounding villages were kept in them for fermentation. There was special equipment to process the fermented

plums into slivovitsa. We, children, used to sip this fermented juice through a straw. It was delicious, but heady. In the late 1920s Czechs introduced state monopoly for production of alcohol, and the equipment from this distillery was shipped to a distillery in Uzhgorod. The building was reconstructed. There were two one-room apartments made in it with all comforts and separate entrance ways. One was leased to a clerk from the village hall and another – to a teacher of the local Slovak school.

There was a big yard in front of the pot house. As soon as it got warm before Pesach the local authorities installed merry-go-rounds there and paid my parents for using the land. Children and their parents could have a meal, ice cream, coffee or cold drinks in the pot house. There were lotteries in the foyer. Lottery tickets cost 1 crown. I remember that the main prize in lottery was a live piglet. There was also a prize hook where prizes could be fished out. A bowling club owner also rented a spot in the yard and paid their rental fees. Spectators made bets and the stake was a barrel of beer that they also bought in the pot house. This was a beneficial business.

There was a big orchard in the backyard and on the other side there were sheds for cows, horses and pigs. All for the livestock was stored in the attic or in haystacks in the yard. People in this area dealt in wood cutting for the most part. They shipped their wood to Uzhgorod on horse or bull-ridden wagons. On their way they stayed in our inn. There was a spot for them to leave horses for a night. There was a trough for the horses. Visitors had dinner in the pot house and slept in the hayloft and in the morning they went to the market in town. Local people followed them to earn some money by cutting the wood they were selling and townsfolk paid them for this work. In the 1930s Czechs introduced the land reform, dividing the area around Onokovtse into plots of land to give them to farmers who stubbed up the trees to plough the land and row grains and vegetables.

We kept livestock: two cows and my father had two horses, pigs and piglets to have fresh meat for the pot house. There were Hungarian pigs grown in the village. There was little meat but fat on them. In two years they were fed to grow 10cm thick fat. My grandfather bought pigs of English breed. They had thin hair and were very delicate. They didn't bear the sun or the heat while the local breed was very strong. My grandfather interbred English pigs with local pigs to make them stronger. A local Ruthenian man fed the pigs and the cows.

When it was time to slaughter pigs my grandfather invited a Czech butcher from Uzhgorod. Usually in the village people didn't skin the pigs, just burned down the bristle, but this butcher skinned the pigs and the skins were delivered to a supply office. The butcher made homemade sausage with meat and rice and liver filling. [called hurka in Hungarian] He marinated pig fat and meat for about a month and then smoked them in the smoking shed in the attic arranged in the spot where all chimneys came together, it was 3 x 3 m, 2 m high. This food was to be sold in the pot house. We didn't eat pork fat or ham, but my father did. He said that the rabbi of Mukachevo allowed him to eat ham, just a little, as much as fit in an egg shell. I don't know whether this was true. My father joked that Spira didn't mention to him whether it had to be a chicken, goose or ostrich egg shell. The only Jewish dish served in the pot house was chicken soup with homemade noodles.

There were 2 Slovak women working in the kitchen. One was a cook and another one was her assistant. The cook did the cooking. My mother tasted the food and added spices. There was a waiter working in each room of the pot house. My mother worked in the food store selling cereals, sugar, salt and all other day-to-day goods. Later she also sold bread baked in the pot house. There

was a 2m wide oven in the stove. After the wood burned down the coals were moved to the front of the oven and bread on trays was placed inside: 10 2kg loaves. It was baked several times a day. On Friday my mother also baked challah loaves for Sabbath. She also made them for 3 other Jewish families living in the village. After the last portion of bread was ready in the evening, my mother placed a pot of cholnt into the oven for our family for the next day. On Friday my mother cooked gefilte fish for Sabbath, chicken broth and potato and corn flour puddings.

Besides working as an accountant in the stores, my father began to work in the town court in Uzhgorod as a wine expert. There were many wine yards in Uzhgorod and in districts. When there were complaints to the quality of wine submitted to the court, my father was to make a statement whether it was low quality of wine or it was the result of poor storage. Once his statement saved a bishop from a big penalty and in his gratitude he gave my father a trip to a very good health center in the Tatras in Slovakia. This health center was built by the Greek Catholic Church for monks. Probably, throughout the history of this health center my father was the only Jew who had ever stayed there.

On Friday evening none of our family worked in the kitchen. The cook, her assistant and waiters managed there. The family got together at home for dinner. My mother lit candles and prayed over them according to the rules. On Saturday, however, all worked. Neologs worked Saturdays in Uzhgorod. The stores where my father worked were open on Saturday, though their owners were Jews. On Saturday morning we went to the prayer house in Nizhneye Domanintse. Then we went home and my father went to work. In the evening, after he came home from work, my father conducted the Havdalah, separation of Saturday from weekdays. We got together and my father lit a candle, smaller than the one to be lit on Sabbath. There was wine served and men had vodka in front of them. My father recited a prayer, then poured a little wine from somebody else's glass or vodka into the saucer to put down the candle in it. Once vodka poured over onto the table and inflamed. There was a burnt spot on the table that over lived my father a long time. My father smoked and he also smoked on Sabbath. My grandfather grumbled about it, but my father joked back that there was nothing said about smoking in the Torah. It wasn't allowed to work on Sabbath, but smoking was for pleasure. However, when we went to the prayer house, my father hid in the bushes to smoke so that other Jews didn't see him smoking. Most Jews in Nizhneye Domanintse were Orthodox and didn't appreciate any deviations from traditions.

While my grandfather lived we celebrated 5 main holidays beginning from Rosh Hashanah. My mother made traditional Jewish food: chicken broth with homemade noodles, gefilte fish, potato pancakes and strudels. On holidays we went to the prayer house. When we returned home, my mother put a dish with apple pieces and honey on the table. We dipped apples into honey and ate them and we also dipped challah that is usually dipped in salt into honey. After Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur started. Before the holiday we conducted the Kapores ritual. My grandfather taught me to ask forgiveness from those whom I hurt intentionally or unintentionally before Yom Kippur. We had a sufficient dinner before the first star appeared in the sky, when 24-hour fast began. Children started to fast half a day at the age of 6 and at the age of 13 they were to fast like adults. Next day we went to the prayer house to pray there until the first star appeared in the sky. My mother gave my father some cookies to give me in the prayer house, but my father and grandfather observed the fast strictly. In the evening we came home for dinner.

The next holiday was Sukkoth. We made a sukkah in the garden in the backyard. According to Jewish customs installation of a sukkah was to start right after Yom Kippur. There was a special site for the sukkah in the yard. We had a folding sukkah that we could use one year after another. There were green branches placed on the roof so that the sky could be seen through them. The sukkah was decorated with ribbons and paper flowers. There was a table and chairs brought into the sukkah. We had meals in the sukkah through all days of the holiday and after the holiday we folded the sukkah back to store it in the storeroom till next year.

There was Chanukkah in winter. My mother lit two candles in a big bronze chanukkiyah: one central candle – shammash, and the candle of the 1st day. Then every day she lit another candle. Children were given Chanukkah gelt. My grandfather was the first to give me some money. My father's sister Maria and sister Karolina, who came to visit us on holiday with her family, also gave me Chanukkah gelt.

Then came Pesach, the last in the calendar, but not the least in significance. My father brought matzah from Uzhgorod and bought in the synagogue special wine, red and very sweet. The house was washed and cleaned. There was not to be a single breadcrumb in the kitchen before the holiday. Everyday rockery and utensils were taken away. There was special crockery for Pesach kept in the attic. My mother cooked traditional food: chicken broth with matzah, boiled chicken, gefilte fish, potato pancakes, puddings and cookies from the matzah flour. In the evening the family got together. There was a prayer recited. Besides other traditional food there was particular food to be eaten on Pesach: a piece of meat with a bone, hard-boiled eggs, ground apples with honey and cinnamon, greenery, horseradish and a saucer with salty water. My grandfather usually conducted the seder. I learned the 4 traditional questions to be posed at seder long before I went to the cheder. I knew them by heart without knowing what they were about. In the center of the table there was a nice wine glass for Elijah the Prophet. Some neolog families just had a prayer on Pesach without conducting the seder. Dinner started with greeneries dipped in salty water and eaten with a piece of matzah. Through all days of Pesach there was no bread in the house. We only ate matzah or potato and corn flour puddings. My father didn't go to work on the first and the last two days of Pesach. My mother and grandfather didn't work either. The store was closed, and in the pot house employees worked.

I went to cheder in the neighboring village at the age of 4. My father took me to the cheder when going to work, and then I returned home with other Jewish boys after classes at 3-4 pm. We took lunches from home with us. Local boys had lunch at home. The rebe spoke Yiddish to us, and I only spoke Hungarian, but by the middle of the first academic year I picked up sufficient Yiddish. Perhaps, the method of stick teaching in the cheder helped. I had never been beaten at home. My parents didn't allow me to go play in the street for punishment. The rebe had a bamboo stick to punish the boys. In the first year we studied the Hebrew alphabet. In the 2nd year of studies we began to read prayers in Hebrew and translate them into Yiddish. In the 3rd form we began to study the Torah. We read chapters from the Torah, translated them into Yiddish and then discussed what we had read. When I turned 7, my parents sent me to the Slovak school in our village and I had to stop my studies in the cheder. It was a Roman Catholic school. The pupils greeted their teacher saying 'Glory to Jesus Christ!' in Latin, a traditional Roman Catholic greeting. [Laudeter Jesus Christus] Jewish children didn't have to attend the religious classes. I finished my 1st form in this school, and went to the 2nd form of a Slovak school in Uzhgorod. I rode a bicycle to school and

later to a grammar school. We also had classes on Saturday. There were no Orthodox Jews in Onokovtse, so nobody cared that I rode a bicycle on Saturday. However, I had to ride across Nizhneye Domanintse to get to Uzhgorod, and there were Orthodox Jews in this village that were angry that a Jewish boy rode a bicycle on Saturday. So, I came home on Friday evening, had dinner with the family and rode back to Uzhgorod to my aunt Karolina where I stayed overnight to go to school on Saturday and returned home on Saturday evening. On Friday evening Karolina's husband went to the synagogue of neologs near the market in Uzhgorod and sometimes took me with him. Now it is an apartment house, but there still can be seen a big relief mogendovid [magen David] under the roof on it.

My parents knew that I needed to know the state language well to continue my education in a grammar school. So I went to the 4th form to a Czech school in Uzhgorod. After finishing my 4th year I went to the Czech 8-year school in Uzhgorod.

I didn't have close friends in the village, though I got along with all children. I had friends in Uzhgorod. Not all of them were Jews, but my parents didn't mind it. They taught me that it wasn't nationality that mattered about a person, but his human virtues.

I was quite young when my grandfather began to teach me veterinary discipline. He was with him at his work and he commented me on what he was doing, but then something happened that I gave up the thought of becoming a vet. An apple stuck in a cow's throat. The cow was suffocating. Its owner was trying to push the apple inside with a stick, but it even got worse. The owner called my grandfather, and my grandfather took me with him. My grandfather put a ring from a wagon's wheel into the cow's mouth to keep it open, and then probed for the apple in its throw. Then he told me to try take it out, but I failed. What were we to do? My grandfather told me to bring a tea spoon from home – we were the only family in the village who had tea spoons. My grandfather tied the spoon to my hand and told me to try and make a hole in the apple with this spoon. I did manage to make a hole, my grandfather hit the cow on her head so that the apple fell out of there, and the cow's stomach content poured all over me. It took me half day to wash it off me, and this was the end of my veterinary career.

My sister was born in 1927. She was named Agnes, and at home we called her Agi, Agica in the Hungarian manner [diminutives for Agnes]. After she was born, in 1927 grandfather Menyhert died after an unsuccessful surgery in the hospital in Uzhgorod. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Uzhgorod and the rabbi of the neolog synagogue in Uzhgorod conducted the funeral. My father recited the Kiddush over my grandfather's grave. Nobody sat shivah after my grandfather – this is not a custom with neologs.

After my sister was born we moved into a small house from the pot house inn. My parents made a two-room apartment from two 1-bedroom apartments. The 2 rooms in the inn were modified to serve as guestrooms. My father left the pot house to my mother. After his death the sign 'Menyhert Bergida' was replaced with 'Anna Ringel'.

I had many friends at school and later in grammar school. Not all of them were Jews. There were good teachers and professors at school. We studied biology, mineralogy, astronomy, botany, natural history, history, geography, mathematic and physics. We studied languages. Our Latin teacher was an aging man. He called 3-4 pupils to the blackboard and we asked each other

questions. We had a good conduct of French and German, and a good knowledge of Latin helped us to understand other languages: Spanish, Italian and Romanian. I remember our teacher of the world history. We always looked forward to his classes. Besides history he taught us to think and consider possible consequences of insignificant at first sight steps. He told us about ancient people and gave an example of the Jewish people as the nation that preserved its traditions. He said that if Jews managed to survive as a nation, this meant they were strong, but he also said that a big enemy of Jews was assimilation. There were also religious classes in the grammar school. At first a teacher of other subjects conducted religious classes for Jews, and his classes were dull. He explained the Torah, told about Jewish holidays and religion, but it was boring. Later a doctor of theology, a rabbi who had finished a higher religious school in Jerusalem, became our teacher. We enjoyed his classes very much. He also taught Hebrew. He was not the only Jewish teacher in the grammar school. I also remember Blan, Doctor of Philosophy, Czech teacher, who was a Jew. He was a neolog.

There was a Jewish grammar school near our school where they studied in Hebrew. This building houses a Hungarian general school now. In front of this building there were few columns and there was a big mogendavid [magen David] on the fronton of the building. I don't know whether it is still there. My future wife studied in this school.

During my studies in elementary school I began to attend the Makkabi [6] club in Uzhgorod. It rented a gym near the school. I went in for track-and-field events. There were only boys in this club. We ran and jumped, played volleyball and basketball. We had two instructors, one was Czech, champion of Czechoslovakia in gymnastics and worked in a bank in Uzhgorod. Another one, training us to run and jump, was a Jew, a tailor. They both only spoke Hebrew to us.

I also was a boy scout. Our neighbor in Onokovtse organized a Czech boy scout group. On summer vacations we went hiking to the woods or mountains and lived in tents. Older boy scouts cooked for us. We learned to march singing songs, swim and mountaineering. We wore dark shorts and white shirts. Scouts wore dark-blue triangle neckties. When I studied in the grammar school in Uzhgorod, my friends talked me into joining the boy scout organization in Uzhgorod.

When I turned 13, I had a bar mitzvah at the neolog synagogue in Uzhgorod. A rebe from the cheder that I went to before school trained me for the bar mitzvah. On Saturday following my birthday the family went to the synagogue. After the prayer the rabbi called me to the Torah. There is a special chapter that a boy should read at his bar mitzvah. I remember it by heart, so many times we read it with the rabbi. I had a tallit on for the first time in my life. Then my father treated all those who were at the synagogue with shlivovitz and honey cake. In the evening we had a dinner party at home. My parents invited the Jewish families living in our village, and my mother's sister Karolina and my father's sister Maria and their families came to the party. Everybody greeted me and brought me presents.

In 1938 Hungarians came to power in Subcarpathia. At first the majority of population was happy about it, but then this welcome began to fade away. Food products and other goods became more expensive. Unemployment developed. Many people were saying that it was good during the Czech rules and wished the Czechs came back. A part of Czechoslovakia, a part of Romania [Hungarian Era] [7] and Northern Yugoslavia [Hungarian Occupation of Yugoslavia] [8] were also annexed to Hungary. Hungary restored its borders it had before WWI. [not completely but partly]

In 1938 I was supposed to finish my grammar school, but when Hungarians came to power they closed Czech schools and grammar schools. I went to a Ruthenian school in the town of Perechin in 20 km from Uzhgorod. I commuted there by train every day. Later this school was also closed and there were only Hungarian schools left. I wanted to go to a Hungarian school in Uzhgorod, but they started preparations for graduation exams and I didn't want to repeat going to the 7th form. Later they opened one class in one of the schools for those who had studied in Czech schools. In September we passed our graduate exams and obtained secondary school certificates.

In 1938 anti-Jewish laws [7] began to be introduced in Subcarpathia. The authorities took away stores, factories, shops from Jewish owners. The Jewish owners had two options: one was to give a store to a non-Jewish owner. They were Christians and for the most part they were nominal owners since former owners still managed their businesses, only they received salary for it. However, if a Jewish owner failed to find a new master of his business within specified terms, the state confiscated his property without any compensation. Jews were forbidden to study in higher educational institutions. Instead of military service they were to serve in work battalions. My father lost his job in Uzhgorod since his Jewish masters lost their businesses. We also had to give away our pot house and store. My father was at WWI and had many awards. He submitted a request for keeping his property considering his services during the war. They kept him in the unknown for a long time before he received a response that his request was gratified. We remained the owners of the store and pot house.

Many Jews in Subcarpathia didn't have a Hungarian citizenship. They had moved to Subcarpathia from Poland during the Czech rule and in their majority didn't have a Czech citizenship either. It was not needed during the Czech rule and they remained Polish citizens. When Hungarians came to power only those who had been Czech citizens could obtain the Hungarian citizenship. In 1942 Hungarians took those who didn't have their citizenship to Ukraine in the USSR. From 1941 Ukraine was occupied by fascist armies [8]. They were moved to Ivano-Frankovsk region where they were exterminated. There were few survivors. There was one family of Jews from Poland in our village. They had a very nice daughter and we were friends. They were all taken away. This girl sent us a letter with a Hungarian soldier. She wrote that some people had been killed and they were waiting for their turn. We never heard from them again.

After finishing school I couldn't continue my studies. Jews were not admitted to higher educational institutions. I went to Budapest where I became an apprentice in the joiner shop. From there I was recruited to the army in 1938. The military commission sent me to a field engineering battalion where I served half a year. We were trained to build pontoon bridges, studied blasting, search and removal of mines on an island on the Danube near Budapest. After the law on work battalions was issued all Jews from 4 field engineering battalions were gathered in one battalion that they called a forced labor battalion. A Hungarian officer became its commander. We wore soldiers' uniforms, but had yellow armbands on our sleeves. Once a week we were given a leave to go to the town. It was necessary to have 20 Fillers [100 Fillers was one Pengo, the currency in interwar Hungary] and one condom to obtain a pass. When we returned from the town we were given injections against venereal diseases. Residents of Budapest often asked us about the yellow bands and we replied that this was a sign of the chemical battalion. Later many of them knew what it meant and sympathized with us. Once I wanted to go to a casino in Budapest. The porter stopped me pointed at the armband and quietly told me to take it off. I put it in my pocket and went in. In Budapest I

met a Jewish family who began to invite me on weekends and Jewish holidays. Later I lost contact with them. We were taken to another camp down the Danube where we built dams on the river. In 1942 we were moved to Ukraine to dig trenches near the front line and removed mines. We kept moving from one place to another. Many people perished there and there were many who lost their arms or legs. Every day before going to bed I begged God to allow me an easy death rather than make me a cripple. In 1943 Soviet troops began an attack and we were taken to Romania to build fortifications on the border and shelters in the mountains. [He probably refers to Northern Transylvania, that is a part of Romania now but was a part of Hungary during those times.] Later we moved to work on a railroad construction. We installed 40 km of the rail track in Northern Transylvania. From there we moved back to Subcarpathia, to the village of Volovets [70 km from Uzhgorod, 600 km from Kiev], in the Carpathian Mountains where we built bunkers and fortifications in the mountains. I was fortunate to have learned the blacksmith's work in the shop in Budapest. I was sent to work in the repair shop where we fixed spades, picks and other tools.

There was happening in Volovets. Once a month Jewish battalions got a 2-day leave. Before another leave Jewish residents came to the commanding officer asking him for help. There was a mikveh in their village, and the water heating boiler got rusty and the water from the pool leaked inside it and put down the fire. The Jews asked the officer to assign workers to help them repair the boiler. The officer sent me and another mechanic to go take a look at the boiler. Only the two of us were from Subcarpathia, the rest were from Budapest in the battalion. The boiler was covered with rust, and we couldn't do anything about it. We told the locals that the body of the boiler needed to be replaced. We told them to ask the officer for a truck to transport the boiler to Uzhgorod for repair. The officer gave us a truck and we went to Uzhgorod. He ordered us to stay in Uzhgorod while the boiler was in repairs. We left the boiler in the shop where they told us that the repairs would take two days. We told the driver to come back a week later, when the boiler was ready, and went home. My companion lived in Mukachevo and I went to Onokovtse. My family was at home. I spent a week with them and then went to Uzhgorod. We took the boiler to Volovets and installed it in the mikveh. While we were in Volovets the two of us got invitations to Jewish families every week and were given a hearty welcome.

In spring 1944 commanding officer of our battalion received a telegram from his commanders that our battalion was to be transferred to Hungary, Szerencs town. We went there by train. There we were given civilian clothes, but we still had the yellow armbands. When we arrived, it turned out that nobody was aware that we were coming and they didn't what to do with us. It turned out that parents of few Jews in the battalion from Budapest talked somebody in the headquarters in Budapest to write Szerencs instead of Szentes. In Szentes, in the south of Hungary, battalions were formed for the front or some mines in Yugoslavia. There were rumors that there was very hard work in those mines and that Jews were treated very badly and sent to the most dangerous sites, but while this all was cleared out, we stayed in Szerencs about 2 months. Since there was nothing else for us to do, we worked at the sugar factory. Then we moved to Szentes when this confusion was cleared. However, the battalion formation there was over and there was no place they could send us. We stayed in Szentes. At that time they began to send Jews to ghettos. They also captured those who tried to hide away. There was a term: 'inspection of pants'. If gendarmes captured a man who said he was not a Jew, but they suspected otherwise they ordered him to take down his pants to check whether he was circumcised. Our battalion was sent to sort out things in the Jewish

houses whose owners were taken to the ghetto. We worked in groups of 5-6 men and 2 Hungarian gendarmes watched the workers. We sorted out the things and hauled them to the synagogue where the town authorities made storages. People were allowed to take some food and few clothes to the ghettos. There were clothes, furniture, household goods, pictures and valuables left. Gendarmes allowed us to take food products and the rest of things we sorted out, packed and loaded on trucks. Other groups unloaded the trucks at the synagogue. Jews were taken to ghettos and then to concentration camps all over Hungary, but in Budapest. In Budapest they were accommodated in so-called Jewish yellow star houses [9]. There were fences around these houses and the inmates were watched by gendarmes. I corresponded with my family. From the last card I received from my father I knew that Jews of Uzhgorod had also been taken to the ghetto. I went to Uzhgorod. The train went as far as Chop [25 km from Uzhgorod, 690 km from Kiev], and I walked about 20 km. In Uzhgorod I was told that the ghetto was in the former brick factory. At quite a distance from the ghetto I heard the buzz of human voices like bees in a beehive. The Hungarian guards didn't allow me to go in there, but they called my mother, my father and sister to the fence. The fence was made from bricks in chess order with openings through which we talked. My father tried to give me a letter through the opening, but the gendarme watching us took it away. This was the last time I saw them. When I returned to Szentes I received a card from my father where he wrote that the following day all Jews were to be taken away from the ghetto. He asked me not to worry. I never heard from them again. After WWII my acquaintances returning home from concentration camps told me that right upon arrival to Auschwitz my father was taken to a gas chamber. My mother looked young for her age. She and my sister were taken to a work camp in Stutthof on the Oder on the Polish-German border. [Stutthof is on the Vistula, near Gdansk.] People who returned from there said there were shootings and bombings and they didn't know for sure how my mother and sister perished. They worked in the woods, on wood processing sites, in this camp. Since winter 1945 Soviet Air Forces were continuously bombing this camp. Many inmates perished then.

From Szentes we were sent over the [former] Yugoslav-Hungarian border, to the Hungarian occupied a part of Yugoslavia. We built fortifications on the right bank of the Tisa river, and lived in the Ada on the bank of the Tisa. I worked in repair shops where we fixed tools. It was October 1944. There was firing heard in the town and locals said that those were partisans shooting in the town. All of a sudden one day Hungarian and German troops began their retreat. Our major told us we were not retreating, but going to build fortifications on the bank of the Tisa to defend our Hungarian motherland. We laughed, but what were we to do – an order was an order and we all went there, even those who had worked in the shops before. Junior officers – corporals and sergeants were already on the bank. We found a German cannon that they dropped since there was something wrong with a wheel and we also found few shells. Germans had removed optical sights from the cannon and it was no good for shooting. The Tisa was wide at that spot and there was a small village, 3-4 houses, on the opposite bank. We were told there were Soviet troops there and we had to shoot at them. There were no artillery men in the battalion. Our officer recalled that his deputy had red shoulder straps, so he was an artillery man. The officer ordered him to take the command! The man tried to explain that he was not an artillery man and that he just had this uniform. What were we to do? Then they recalled that our work battalion had been formed from army troops. There was an old man from who was a spieler in a park of attractions in Budapest. He had boasted that he was an artillery man during WWI. The officer called for him. He said we had

everything but the sights for shooting. The sergeant climbed a high weeping willow over the Tisa to correct the shooting. A cannon is even more plain than a rifle. The old man took a 105 mm shell, put it in the cannon, closed the lid, targeted it conventionally onto the village and pulled something there. He also told us to plug our ears and open the mouth to save the hearing. This was the way with artillery men, he said. Bang! The sergeant shouted from the weeping willow: about one kilometer shot over the target! The old man turned something, lowered the barrel, took another shell, shot it - the shell flew to the left. Another shell - undershoot again. When all of a sudden mines from the opposite bank began to fall on us! It turned out the Soviet troops had their mine cannons installed and began to shoot at us and at the town. The sergeant fell from the weeping willow into the river - it was his luck. We fell onto the ground. Nobody was wounded, only two were shell shocked. The officer ordered us to retreat. We packed and loaded the kitchen facility onto a wagon. We walked about 80 km to the Danube where we stopped to cross the river. Soviet planes were dropping bombs on the bridge and blasted it finally. Then there were pontoon bridges installed. We were waiting for our turn to cross the river, when I decided to escape and hide in the town. A military patrol seized me in about one kilometer from the crossing spot. They sent me back. I was lucky since they might have killed me. We crossed the river and walked on to the Austrian-Hungarian border, over 300 km. Soviet troops were in Uzhgorod already. They were advancing. We were sent to dig trenches, obstacles and tank ditches. We were moving away from the border and worked on the territory of Austria. Tank ditches were 2 m deep V-shape pits narrowing at the bottom. There were work battalions, and 15-40 year-old women from Jewish houses in Budapest doing this job. There were over 2 thousand women digging ditches. There were also people from other work battalions retreating with Hungarians units from Yugoslavia. They were very miserable. It was frosty outside, and they hardly had any clothes, many of them were frost-bitten and all of them had a cold. Our guards were SS soldiers.

Chief of our camp was a German from Budapest, a volksdeutsch [10]. Parents of some of my fellow comrades from Budapest knew him and he was rather loyal to us: we got better food and were sent to easier jobs. Once I injured my arm at work and this injury developed periostitis. I couldn't do any work and there were no medications available. All I could do was keeping my hand in the water that I heated on the fire. Once, when I was keeping my hand in water a boy from Hitler Jugend stopped before me shouting in German: 'You, dirty Jew, you must work!'. I remained sitting and he threatened to kill me. He took his rifle from his shoulder, pulled the breech mechanism as if he wanted to load it, when all of a sudden a bullet fell out of the rifle. This means it was loaded and if he pointed it at me even incidentally and pulled the trigger, this would mean the end of me. He got so confused seeing this bullet that he forgot about everything and left.

In winter 1945 Soviet planes started firing at our positions and we evacuated from there urgently. Women evacuated separately. Only recently I read in a newspaper of the Hungarian Jewish community what happened to them. They were moving to the north in the direction of the Slovak border. Of 2000 women about 800 survived. The rest of them were either killed or died from hunger and exhaustion on their way. 300 women came to Budapest and the rest of them wandered to different locations.

We walked few dozen kilometers in columns of 5 in a row. There was one SS guard for 10 rows. The weaker ones walked in the rear of the column, in the dust raised by those walking ahead. Their clothes and faces were covered with dust. If somebody couldn't walk and came out of the column

Germans killed him. There was another advantage for those walking ahead. We found food leftovers dropped by the soldiers walking ahead of us. We were given little food. In one village we stopped to rest. The SS soldiers decided to have some entertainment. They stood in two lines and we were made to run the gauntlet. They hit us with rifle butts. I took off my coat and wrapped it around my head. I tried to walk by the fence to be at least protected from one side and managed to get through it. There was an older man running ahead of me. I knew him: he was chief doctor and owner of a private polyclinic in Budapest. He had a big rucksack on his back. The rope on its top broke and the rucksack was hanging loose banging on his knees. He couldn't run and a German hit him on the bridge of his nose and broke it. He fell, I ran to him and dragged him with me. He happened to have books on medicine in his rucksack – they were so heavy. Other guys helped me to drag this man and his rucksack. I don't know what happened to him. He must have perished. All weak and sick inmates were exterminated in Mauthausen. Then we boarded a train to Mauthausen.

We didn't know we were going to the concentration camp. We thought we were moving to another work site. The train stopped on the way. It ran out of coal. We were ordered to gather wood in the field. The train moved on, but again ran out of fuel and we walked about 2 km to Mauthausen. The weaker and sick ones were ordered to step aside. They were ordered to board trucks and taken to the camp. They were exterminated in a gas chamber upon arrival to the camp – there was no sorting out. We came to a big gate where there was a sign in German: 'Work gives freedom'. The guards told us that the main camp was overcrowded and we were sent to a subcamp of Mauthausen. There was a long barrack. Other inmates of the camp told us to stay away from this barrack. There were prisoners from Ukraine kept in this barrack and the barrack was full of typhus lice. We lay on the ground. In about 200 m from this barrack there was another similar barrack where they kept 8-15 year old children from concentration camps in Poland. We stayed outside for 2 or 3 days before Germans cleaned and disinfected the barrack and we could go inside. Germans delivered food in big thermal containers and gave it to us in front of the barrack. In the morning we got some dark liquid that they called coffee for some reason. For lunch we got a pot of soup with rotten vegetables. Occasionally there were beans in the soup. There was one loaf of bread for 10 inmates per day given to us, 100 grams per person. Of course, we couldn't cut identical slices: some of us had bigger slices and others got smaller ones. The children had the system, but they were having problems. When Germans brought them food, the children pounced on those thermos bottles. They often turned them upside down and Germans laughed looking at the fighting children, hit them with their sticks or even shoot at them. Children didn't have any pots. We had the pots from the time we were in the work battalions and children had nothing to eat from. They begged for empty tins in the kitchen. When cooks opened tins with meat they made holes in the bottom to make it easier for them to push out the meat. The children kept their fingers on these holes when soup was poured into their tins. Those who took their fingers away lost their soup. They had another idea: they took off their wooden clogs that they wore in the camp and had their soup poured into them. Older children managed to get 2-3 portions of soup and some extra bread and there was nothing left for younger children. Many children were starving to death. We decided to get things in better order there. Only my companion from Mukachevo and I knew Czech. We decided that since we understood when they spoke Polish, they were to understand Czech. We went to the children's barrack. But they began to throw stones on us shouting 'Magyar, Magyar!' They probably had bad memories about Hungarians.

There was a barrack where Czech inmates lived. They were in a privileged position comparing to others. The Czechs worked at a plant in the town and were given food at the plant canteen. When they had extra food they shared it with us. We left some of this food on a stump in front of the children's barrack. Some children took the food and the others didn't probably fearing something bad. Once we left some bread, margarine and jam on the stump and hid away. The children came close and we surrounded them. They began to scream 'don't touch us, we are Polish'. We told them they were not Polish, but Jewish, and that we were not Hungarians, but Jews, but they kept screaming trying to escape. We finally managed to convince them that we would do no harm to them. They agreed to let us speak to their leader, 15-year old Juzek. In the evening he came into our barrack with two other boys. We explained them what our intentions were emphasizing that there was a blaze of artillery cannonades visible in the evening, which meant that the Russian troops were coming and that if they continued to behave the way they did they would either die from hunger or Germans would kill them and they would not live till we were liberated. We told them we would help them to bring things to order. In the morning, before Germans came with thermos bottles we came to their barrack. Juzek explained who we were. We told the children to line up. When Germans came with food, the children were standing in line very quietly. Germans even asked what happened. The children understood this was better for them.

In April 1945 military troops were approaching Mauthausen and we evacuated to Gunskirchen town in about 20 km from Mauthausen. There were also barracks there and prisoners from surrounding camps were taken to this area. Germans were raging and we understood that the war was coming to an end. We were given miserable food: 2 potatoes in their skin per day. Many people died every day and there were corpses piling in the yard. Every other day corpses were loaded on trucks and hauled to the crematorium. It was horrific that there were meat parts cut out on some corpses. Inmates from the Polish barrack were selling meat saying it was horse meat... Germans began to watch them and discovered that they were cutting meat from the corpses. They killed 10 inmates doing this. The guards were Germans from regular army. [Wehrmacht] The SS soldiers disappeared, and these guards were rather loyal to us. The area of the camp was rather big and Germans didn't mind that we walked around. We were not allowed to come into the barrack of Germans. We could find carrots and potatoes in abandoned storage facilities. When there were no air raids we were allowed to make food on fire. We began to receive parcels with biscuits, jam, cigarettes and matches from the English Red Cross. It was called the St. George Cross. I didn't smoke and exchanged cigarettes for bread and biscuits. When we received the food it was better to eat it all at once since it was stolen at nights, even if we put boxes with food under a pillow.

On 5 May 1945 we woke up from the roar of shooting in the morning. I stepped out of the barrack. The Germans guard warned me to not approach the fence since he had an order to shoot. The shooting was somewhere near. I lay on the ground to not be shot by stray bullet. All of a sudden the gate of the camp open and camouflage color trucks drove in. I couldn't see from afar whose troops these were, but then I saw Negroes in the trucks. American soldiers. All inmates ran out of their barracks hugging and kissing the Americans. It's horrible to think of how we smelled – we hadn't washed for a long time before... The Americans gave us meat cans and bread. It didn't occur to many prisoners that after a long period of hunger they had better not eaten fat food and bread, but they pounced on the food. Few hours later many of them felt ill and even died. But we were free! We were issued certificates of prisoners of a concentration camp indicating that the US

army liberated us. I said I was a citizen Czechoslovakia. I thought Hungarians were occupants. In my certificate my name was written as Ladislav in the Czech manner. I had to obtain another certificate confirming that Laszlo Ringel and Ladislav Ringel was one and the same person. The Americans hauled those who were ill to a hospital. The rest of us could do whatever we wanted. Few of us went to Linz. On our way we saw an abandoned vehicle. We got inside – there was no gasoline left. We saw a broken vehicle nearby and a canister of gasoline inside. We took the canister and drove to the town in this vehicle. We told the first patrol on our way that we were liberated from the concentration camp. They took us to former German barracks with other former inmates of concentration camps. This barrack was dirty and overcrowded and we decided to stay in the town. We lodged on the attic in a house where there was only an old woman staying. She was glad to have us. We kept wandering in the town not knowing what to do. I recalled how many people were taken to hospital by Americans and felt like helping these people somehow. I decided to find the hospital and see whether they could employ me there. I visited several hospitals before I got a job in one of them deployed in the former German Air Force School. There were 3-storied barracks where they arranged wards for patients. There were French and Slavic patients in the camp for the most part. They had been taken there from concentration camps. I knew French, Ruthenian, Czech and Slovak. At first I helped the hospital attendants to carry the patients to the reception room and then take them to their wards. I interpreted for the doctor, captain of medical services in the American army. He spoke French and I translated what patients were telling him. He put down their names and home addresses. There were many French, Belgian, Serbs, and Croats in the hospital from all over Europe. I could understand them all. I made lists of patients for the Red Cross. There were many women. Once, when making another list, I noticed that there were 4 women with the same surname and home address in the hospital. All four had enteric typhus, high fever, all were in poor condition. One was about 50 years old, the others were much younger. We decided they were relatives. Few days later one young woman died and the rest were on their way to recovery. They happened to be the mother and 3 daughters, all came from different camps and didn't know about each other. I worked there for about 8 months. I saw many people with different lives. There was a Polish woman taken to the hospital from a concentration camp. I don't know how she survived: she was skin and bones. She was in her 9th month of pregnancy and weighed 40 kg, but the baby was born with standard weight, a good strong girl. She was born on 9 May 1945, and chief of the hospital, American, named the girl Victoria in honor of the victory. There was another story: one of the Americans working in the hospital met a girl from a concentration camp and they fell in love with one another. When she recovered they got married. The girl got pregnant. He wrote his parents that he got married and they were going to have a baby. There was a war with Japan going on, and all of a sudden he was sent to Japan. A short time later his wife received a notification on his death. This guy's parents took her with them to the USA.

There also was German medical personnel in the hospital at the beginning. Americans captured a German medical battalion and doctors, nurses and attendants were assisting in the hospital, but in some cases they were trying to do harm. There was a patient in a ward. Her injury didn't heal, and each time after a doctor's visit the injury got worse. Her companion said that each time the doctor applied some powder on the injury. When they checked the injury after the doctor's visit, it turned out to be salt that he applied. He was shot. There were 2 or 3 children's wards in the hospital. Once the children attacked a German attendant hitting him with what they had at hand. The Americans tried to keep the children away from him, but it was hard. They beat this attendant

within an inch of his life. As it turned out, he was an SS guard in their camp, and the children recognized him. The workers of the hospital found an SS tattoo on his hand. There was another incident. The food for employees and patients was made from tinned meat mainly. There were few German workers in the kitchen. The patients began to complain that there was too much salt in their food. An American officer hid in the kitchen to watch what was going on there. He saw a German worker adding packs of salt to the pots with food. He was also shot. There were also other German doctors and nurses dedicated to their work. They even rescued hopeless patients from dying.

There were funny stories as well. Besides, this American hospital, there was a Soviet hospital for the former Soviet prisoners-of-war on the air field. Some patients were allowed to go to town,. There was a village near the town. American soldiers guarded the air field. Every one hundred meters there were patrol jeep vehicles with guards who had radios. Soviet patients often stole sheep and calves from the village to cook them. They also took away food products from villagers. When they stole a calf they had to plot how to take it past the guards. They talked two Polish boys to help them. They found a goat, put a rope around its neck and began to pull it by the rope through the gate. The goat stood up to the boys bleating: they made a lot of noise. The guard saw this picture and burst into laughter. He called other guards to come and watch this show. 3 jeep vehicles from other posts arrived. They began to take photos of the boys pulling the goat and at this time former prisoners-of-war brought their calf or whatever else they had through the posts that the American military left unguarded. They also robbed people in the streets, broke into their houses to take away their jewelry or money.

In early 1946 the hospital was closed and we left it. Slovak border was the nearest to us and we headed to Bratislava with other companions from Subcarpathia. There were about 12 of us. We sailed on a boat along the Danube and then walked the rest of the way. The bridges were blasted, their fragments blocked the waterway and the boats couldn't sail. I found a cart and loaded my belongings on it and in order nobody took me for a fascist I drew a red pentagonal star on it. German and Hungarian soldiers convoyed by Slovaks were moving from Bratislava. The soldiers searched us and took from us what they liked. We were taken to the Slovakian bank, to the point where we were subject to disinfection, registration and where we were given some money for the road. From there we got to Bratislava and walked to Subcarpathia via Budapest. In Bratislava we were asked to take care of a group of Subcarpathian children, who were taken to Bratislava from concentration camps, there were 15 of them. The children were from Beregovo, Khust and Mukachevo. I wished I could get off the train and spend few days in Budapest, but I couldn't leave the children. When we arrived at Uzhgorod, we separated. I went home to Onokovtse.

In Bratislava we were told that Subcarpathia had been given to the USSR. All I knew about the USSR was that the Soviet army bore the main burden of the war. I was hoping that after WWII Subcarpathia would become Czechoslovakian again, but these hopes failed./ I was hoping again that at least life would not be much worse in the USSR. I understood that about any regime there were people who appreciated changes and there were those who were not happy with any. So I decided to make no hasty conclusions, but wait and see.

Our both houses in Onokovtse were occupied. The pot house became a storage house and in the house where we lived with my parents after my sister was born was inhabited by some newcomers.

The door of the pot house was closed, but I knew the way to get inside. There was a manhole in the attic that was never locked. I got inside through this manhole. I took few photographs and some clothes. I stayed a little among the things that were dear to me when I was a child: a chess table with the chess board made from ivory and black stone, the table with a burnt spot when my father spilled some vodka during Havdalah. On the door of the wardrobe from the inside my mother inscribed the names of cows and calving dates. There was the memory of my family living in this house. I stayed overnight with our neighbors who were happy that I was back. On the next day I went to Uzhgorod. I was hoping to find my aunt Karolina, my mother's sister, who might know about my family. I only found Miklos, my cousin, there. He was in a work battalion from where he was taken to a concentration camp, and Americans liberated him. Miklos was working in his father's furniture shop. He offered me to stay with him and work in the shop. Miklos told me what happened to my mother's sisters. Aunt Karolina and her husband perished in a concentration camp and so did my mother's sister Rozsa and her husband living in Slovakia. Rozsa's daughter Edit was in a labor camp where she perished. Rozsa's son Tibor survived, but I didn't have any information about him. Miklos' brother Sandor escaped to England in 1938 after Hungarians came to power. During WWII he served in the Czechoslovakian Legion in the British army. After the war Sandor returned to Britain and married an English woman. They lived in London. We didn't correspond and this is all I know about him. He might have passed away. He was older than me.

I went to work in the furniture shop. I learned to work on the wood treatment lathe. I lived in a room in the shop. I had meals in the town. There was a Red Cross 'Social care' organization in Russkaya Street where they had a canteen to provide meals to those who returned from concentration camps. I met girls and courted many of them there. It was there that I met my future wife Lea Helman, a young girl with big black eyes. We began to meet. Lea came from Bogdan village [175 km from Uzhgorod, 560 km from Kiev] Rakhov district in Subcarpathia. She was born in 1927. Her Jewish name was Laya. My wife was born Lea, later the Ukrainians made Helena of her. Although in the town some called her Helen at home she was always called Lea. The entire family called her Lea all the time. Her father Moishe Helman was a farmer and her mother Beila Helman was a housewife. There were 11 children in the family, but before WWII 9 of them were in Subcarpathia. One died in his teens from a disease. One of Lea's older brothers escaped to England after the Hungarians came to power, during the war he served in the Czechoslovakian Legion in the British army and returned to England after the war. When he got to know that his brothers and sisters returned from the concentration camp he decided to visit them. Soviet authorities arrested him accusing him of espionage and sent him to the GULAG [12] where he perished. The rest of the children were taken to the ghetto in April 1944 and from there they were taken to Auschwitz. Lea's mother and father were exterminated in Auschwitz immediately, and Lea and her brothers and sisters were sent to different concentration camps. They were young and managed to survive and returned to Subcarpathia. Lea was taken to a labor camp in Schlanitzsee town in Germany. She met an Austrian Jewish girl and they became friends. When in January 1945 evacuation of the camp began, Lea and her friend managed to escape. They both spoke fluent German. Some kind people helped them to get Aryan documents and certificates of baptism and they lived till May 1945 with these documents. Lea worked as a servant for a German family. By the way, later she got to know that her older sister Rivka also escaped in the same way. She managed to escape from the camp, get some Christian documents, and she lived in a German town and even worked as a conductor in a tram. It was easier for girls, there was no 'inspection of pants' for them. When

American troops came to the town where Lea lived, she went back to Subcarpathia. Once my wife and I went to Bogdan village to visit the graves of her relatives. I saw the house their family lived in before the war. It was abandoned. A little decayed house. Lea came to Uzhgorod where she entered a medical school for medical nurses. In Uzhgorod she met with her brothers and sisters who returned from concentration camps. I don't remember all of them, though I used to know them. The oldest was Laib. Then two sisters, Sarra and Liebe were born, and then three others, whose names I don't remember. Then came Rivka, Mehl and my wife Lea. They were all very close. I don't know how religious my wife's parents were. Of course, the young generation was not so religious, but they celebrated Jewish holidays.

Shortly after establishment of the Soviet power in Subcarpathia, before Soviet passports were issued and before registration of the population, my wife's brothers and sisters moved to Israel. As a rule, a big group of those who wanted to emigrate, went to Romania where they rented a boat to sail to Israel. They settled down in towns and kibbutzim. One of them, Leib Helman, a lawyer, was even a mayor of Beer Sheva. Under his guidance a block of houses was built. It's called Helman. There was his bust installed in front of a supermarket in Beer Sheva. There is only one sister living now – Sarra. The rest of them have passed away. Their children and their families live in Israel. Lea didn't go with them. She wanted to obtain a diploma of the medical nurse and then follow them to Israel. I also thought it was right to move to Israel having a profession. It never occurred to us that we would live behind the 'iron curtain' [13] for so many decades. My cousin Miklos didn't stay in Subcarpathia either. The Soviet power expropriated his furniture shop. Miklos was afraid of being arrested and crossed the border with Hungary where he lived his life. He married a Jewish girl from Budapest and they had children. They lived in Budapest. Miklos died in the 1980s and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Budapest.

I married Lea in 1946. There were no relatives of ours left in Subcarpathia by that time. My wife's cousin, a tailor, who lived in Uzhgorod in a cottage, made a real Jewish wedding for us. There was a chuppah in the yard of his house, and a rabbi from the only synagogue in Uzhgorod conducted the wedding ceremony. There was a funny incident during the registration of our marriage in the registry office. They required our birth certificates. Lea didn't have one and we went to the registry office in Rakhov, to obtain a copy from the archives. It turned out that her brothers and sisters were registered there, but not Lea. Later we figured out that there was a grandmother or grandfather registering the children, or the mother or father, and they missed Lea. Lea had to go for a medical examination to the polyclinic. They put down the year of birth that she indicated and the day and month when we came to the polyclinic. After the wedding we settled down with my wife's cousin. She studied at school and I worked in the furniture shop that belonged to the state already. We obtained Soviet passports. My wife was written down as Helena. Was told in the passport office that the Russian equivalent of Laszlo was Vasiliy and issued my passport with the name of Vasiliy Ringel. I tried to protest telling them that if Laszlo was not all right for them, then let them right down the Czech name of Ladislav, but chief of this passport office stood his grounds. At that time they introduced the Russian language and Russian names in use. My wife convinced me that it didn't make sense to put one's freedom at risk for the sake of a name. We already saw what was happening during the Soviet rule. After Lea's brother was arrested and exiled I understood that this regime was capable of anything. They were closing the synagogues and Christian [Eastern Orthodox] and Catholic churches in Subcarpathia turning them into some

storage facilities. They were ruining, of course. Religion was announced outlawed and believers were persecuted. There was a Bergida man in Uzhgorod, perhaps, even some distant relative on my mother's side, I don't know. He was chief of logistics of a big synagogue in Uzhgorod. He was charged with something political and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in camps in the GULAG. It was clear that it was only related to his religious activities. 10 years later he returned. He was very ill and died a short time later. It was dangerous to have relatives abroad during the Soviet regime. They might fire from work or put to prison on charges of espionage [Keep in touch with relatives abroad] [15] for correspondence with them. We couldn't keep in touch with my cousins or my wife's relatives. The Russian language was mandatory: we had to study it and speak it. Adults also had to learn the language: they couldn't get a job without knowing it.

My wife and I were not strongly religious, but we always remembered that we were Jews and tried to observe Jewish traditions as much as we could considering the Soviet restrictions. We celebrated major Jewish holidays at home. On Friday evening Lea lit candles and prayed. She hadn't finished the Jewish grammar school due to the war, but she knew Hebrew better than I did. We always had matzah on Pesach. Lea and her cousin's wife baked it at home. Later we could buy matzah shipped from Budapest. We celebrated Soviet holidays at work, but not at home. It was just another day off for us. The only Soviet holidays that my wife and I recognized was Victory Day, 9 May [16].

In 1947 our daughter Vera, Dveira in Jewish was born. In 1950 our son Mihaly, Moishe in Jewish, after his grandfathers, Lea's father and mine, and Mikhail in his Soviet passport was born. During the Soviet period we couldn't have our son circumcised at the synagogue, but my wife and I believed that we had to do it. We went to the children's hospital and made arrangements with the children's surgeon to make circumcision. Circumcision is prescribed in case of phimosis. The surgeon put down this diagnosis in the medical records of my son and operated on him for medical reasons. Of course, it wasn't quite like the ritual of brit milah. It was a surgery in a surgery room. No relatives or a rabbi were present. This doctor must have sympathized with Jews and was not positive about the Soviet power. My son was not the only baby that he operated on. He didn't charge any money from us.

After our son was born, there was too little space for all of us to continue to live with my wife's cousin. We decided to move to Onokovtse. I managed to get back our little house. To my surprise, it took little time. I repaired the house as much as I could and we moved in there. I was surprised and moved, when local farmers began to bring the things that they had taken from our abandoned house. They returned pictures, portraits of my father and grandfather and some pieces of furniture.

Lea finished her school and went to work as a medical nurse in the children's tuberculosis health center in Onokovtse. I worked in the furniture shop for some time, but then I was sent to work in a village not far from Uzhgorod, where they were restoring a saw mill. I don't remember the name of the village, all I remember is that it was on the bank of a river and there was a high hill by the river. On the opposite bank there was a training field of Soviet tanks and mobile units. During their training they used to shoot at this hill across the river. Once we were sitting on a log during a lunch break, when there was an explosion in the river. At first we thought somebody deafening the fish, but then shells began to fall near where we sat. I shouted for everybody to lie on the ground. One guy kept standing and a shell cut him apart. When it became quiet I ran away. When the blasts repeated I lay on the ground again. Then it became quiet. Besides the guy killed by a shell, there

was a wagoner killed near the gate to the mill. When explosions began, the horses got scared and dashed off to the closed gate. The horses and the wagoner perished. There was one wounded in his arm. Officers from the training field came to see what happened. One of them, a major, asked me why I ran. I told him I was running away from shells. He turned away and I heard him saying to his comrades: 'Cowardly zhyd!'. I asked him, when there were bombings during the war, did he lie down or jump up to be seen better? I didn't wait for his answer. I submitted a letter of resignation and returned to Onokovtse. This was the first time that I heard the word 'zhyd' [kike] addressed to me after I returned to Subcarpathia. This word was not new to me: there are similar words in the Czech, Hungarian or Ruthenian languages, but without such abusive connotations. I remember our teacher of history at school saying to us: a word is like the scissors - you can use them to make manicure and also, to kill a person. Everything depends on the meaning you put in it. Later I heard the word 'zhyd' many times and always in the abusive meaning. Soviet people who came to Subcarpathia from the USSR brought anti-Semitism with them. At first it was of everyday meaning, but in 1948 when struggle against cosmopolites [17] began, it reached the state level. It became difficult for Jews to find jobs and enter colleges. I went to work as an accountant in the kolkhoz [18], organized in Onokovtse. Some time later elections of chairman of the kolkhoz took place. The local villages who knew me since I was a child nominated me for this position. I wasn't a member of the party, but this did not become a decisive factor. Secretary of the Party organization who had come from the USSR announced before voting that he wasn't putting me on the voting list since the kolkhoz didn't need a Jewish chairman. This was said openly at the meeting. Anti-Semites didn't have to conceal themselves any longer.

My wife and I tried to stay away from those who had moved to Subcarpathia from the USSR or anything occurring in the USSR. We had little in common with them. We didn't care of what was going on in the USSR or from what concerned them in this regard. We had many Jewish and non-Jewish friends in Subcarpathia. When in January 1953 the 'doctors' plot' [19] began, none of residents of original Subcarpathia believed what newspapers were publishing. Our best doctors were Jews and nobody lost trust in them because of the lies published in newspapers, while when those who had moved from the USSR, when they came to a polyclinic, demanded to have a non-Jewish doctor. There were meetings condemning the doctors poisoners. We understood that this was the first step, preparation for further persecutions. I think that only Stalin's death saved us from exile like deportation of other nations in the USSR. I and many of my friends and acquaintances took Stalin's death with relief. We knew that under Stalin's orders many peoples were deported: Crimean Tatars, Chechen and Germans of the Volga region. We were hoping that things would be better after his death. We couldn't understand why those comers from the USSR were crying and lamenting as if their closest person had died. After the speech of Nikita Khrushchev [21] on the 20th Party Congress [22] we believed that there was no way back for the past and that a new life was beginning in the USSR. At first it seemed that our hopes might come true. Innocent people began to return from camps. Anti-Semitism was reducing, but it didn't last long. Of course, it wasn't like it used to be during Stalin's regime, there were no public trials or mass shootings. The term 'enemy of the people' [23] that Soviet people were used to was gone. But this was all about it. Anti-Semitism was there and also this terrible poverty that we lived in from the time Subcarpathia was annexed to the USSR didn't disappear. The leading role of the Communist Party stayed in place. It wasn't an agronomist assigning the sowing dates, but secretary of the district Party committee. It was ridiculous for us. We grew up during the Czech rule

and knew what a good decent life was and what love to one's own country was about. How could one love the USSR? Perhaps, if one was born, grew up there and didn't know anything different. That they cut off any opportunity for communicating with foreigners and learning about life in other countries from somewhere else, but Soviet newspapers had its reasons. People had nothing to compare their life with, but we lived our own life, apart from the life in the Soviet Union. I didn't want to know anything about what was going on there. The only event touching me was invasion of Hungary [1956] [24] and Czechoslovakia [Prague Spring] [25]. When in 1956 the USSR troops invaded Hungary and in 1968 – Czechoslovakia, I was indignant to the bottom of my heart. It was rather similar to Hitler invasion of Europe. Could anybody believe that Hungary and Czechoslovakia could not resolve their problems and requested the USSR for bringing in their troops? I understood that the USSR has suppressed and would suppress any efforts of any country to get out of the 'socialist camp' and build the life of their people on their own will and that everything that happened was natural, but I understood this in my mind and in my heart there was indignation.

My children were growing up like all other Soviet children. They studied in a general school and were pioneers and Komsomol [26] members which was usual. They had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. For my wife and me nationality didn't matter. What mattered was the person. However, we raised our children Jewish. My wife taught them Hebrew and told them about the Jewish history, traditions and religion. At about the age of 4 my son knew 4 traditional questions in Hebrew by heart. When I conducted seder at home on Pesach he posed four traditional questions to me according to the rules. Of course, my wife and I told them that they shouldn't talk about it in the kindergarten or school since we might face problems if they did. It's strange, but the children understood this. We organized a bar mitzvah, when my son turned 13. Our friends, Subcarpathian Jews, attended it, and the ritual was conducted according to the rules. My wife and I spoke Hungarian and Yiddish at home, and spoke Yiddish, Hungarian, and sometimes Russian to the children. I didn't know Yiddish as well as my wife: it was her mother tongue while I only studied it in the cheder, but I picked it promptly from my wife. My wife believed that our children had to know Yiddish.

After finishing school my daughter went to work as telegrapher at the post office and studied at the Electric Engineering College in Zaporozhiye by correspondence. When she received her diploma she was promoted to the position of electrical engineer. She worked at the post office till she moved to Israel. When she was a student, Vera got married. Her husband Viacheslav Dolburd, a Jew, was born in Uzhgorod in 1945, his parents had moved to Subcarpathia from the USSR before. Viacheslav was an engineer, he worked at the Uzhgorod instrument making plant. They had two sons: Iosif, born in 1981, and Yefim, born in 1983. Both grandsons had circumcision according to the rule. We had to make the same trick that we used when having our son circumcised. The same surgeon circumcised my grandsons in the polyclinic.

My son was recruited to the army after finishing school. He served as a mechanic in an Air Force unit. He finished a course of driving there. After returning to Uzhgorod Mihaly worked as a driver in the health center where my wife worked and later – in a fire brigade. Mihaly married Sofia Yakovleva, a Russian girl. She and her parents had moved to Subcarpathia somewhere from Russia. Sofia's father was a military, and the family moved from one place to another. They settled down in Uzhgorod, and Sofia's father served there till he retired and the family stayed to live here. Sofia and Mihaly have daughter Yelena, born in 1978 and son Leo, born in 1985. Sofia works in the

restaurant built where the pot house used to be. When Hesed was organized in Uzhgorod, Mihaly came to work as a driver in the Hesed.

When in the 1970s Jews began to move to Israel in great numbers, we decided to move there as well. The USSR never became a Motherland to us and we did not get used to it. We were hoping to have a decent life in Israel and that our grandsons would grow up in the country that will become their Motherland. There were relatives and friends in Israel and we would not suffer from solitude. Unfortunately, it didn't happen as we thought. When our son returned from the army, we submitted out documents for departure to Israel. My wife's relatives sent us an invitation letter. Some time later I was called to the office where we submitted the documents and they told me that my wife and I could go, but my son could depart from the USSR only ten years later due to his service in the army, because in their opinion he was aware of state secrets. This was ridiculous, he was a soldier, but it was impossible to prove anything. We didn't want to leave our son and we stayed.

Few years before retirement I quit my job and went to work at the souvenir shop of the Uzhgorod factory in the small village of Seredneye near Uzhgorod. I worked with wood and later began to make wooden souvenirs and design samples for further manufacturing. I learned drawing in the grammar school. This proved to be handy in my work on souvenirs. For the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980 I made a souvenir: 2 wooden football players 10-12 cm high, on the round stand from birch wood. There was an inscription on the stand: Moscow 80, and 5 rings, the symbol of this Olympic Games. Moscow approved this sample for manufacture. For this souvenir I was awarded a bronze medal at the Exhibition of Achievements of the Public Economy in Moscow. This was work by orders and I could earn up to 500 rubles per month [The average salary in the USSR was 130 rubles at the time]. Of course, my family was assisting me. I took work home and my wife and daughter helped me to glue the figures together, but this didn't last long – they introduced restrictions on salaries limiting them to 250 rubles. I employed my son – he was a driver in the fire brigade at that time. He worked one day every four days.

We still lived in the small house that was not sufficient for three families. My wife and I were saving money for a new house. We started construction in 1975 on the site of our old house. We wanted our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to live in this house. We made a 2-storied building: 3 rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom on each floor. We also planted a big orchard and vineyard around the house. My wife and I and our son with his family lived on the first floor and on the 2nd floor – our daughter with her husband and sons. There are children's voices in the house. My granddaughter Yelena and her husband Ivan Nestor, Ukrainian, live with us. They have two children, my great grandchildren: Mihail, born in 1997, and Yelena, born in 2000 after my wife died, named after my wife Lea.

At leisure time I often went to the mountains to draw. I liked making landscapes and draw old houses of Uzhgorod. When I began to work at the souvenir shop, I got another hobby. I gathered branches and roots in the woods to make figures or candle stands from them – the shape of snags gave me ideas of what was to be made from them. I only keep few of them – I gave away most of them for presents.

My daughter and her family moved to Israel in 1992. They settled down in a kibbutz not far from Qiryat Yam. In this kibbutz they raise poultry, keep a dairy farm and grow flowers and citrus plants. There is also a plant of plastic goods there. My daughter works as a cashier in a food store in the

kibbutz. Her husband works at the factory of plastic goods. Their both sons serve in the army. After their term is over they plan to enter a university. They are happy with their new life and love their new Motherland. Last year after finishing a secondary school my grandson, Mikhail's son Lev, moved to Israel. He wants to continue his studies in Israel and is going to stay there. Lev has finished his service in the army. Recently he came to Uzhgorod to visit us. He lives in Ashdod.

When in the late 1980s perestroika [27] began in the USSR, I had a doubtful attitude to it like everything else happening in the USSR. Some time later I saw that I was wrong this time. Freedom came to our life. Newspapers published such things, for which people were imprisoned in the GULAG recently. It became possible to correspond with people abroad and even travel to other countries and invite people from other countries. The ban on religion was gone. People were allowed to go to churches and synagogues and celebrate religious holidays. The only problem was that the people didn't have a need in religion any more during the years of the Soviet regime. In Uzhgorod there were not enough men even for a minyan, but gradually religion began to revive. During perestroika in Uzhgorod the Jewish community was organized. Of course, it couldn't do as much for people as Hesed is doing now, but we were happy about it. The community began to attract people to the synagogue, teach them prayers and traditions. The community arranged for matzah to be delivered from Budapest and provide prayer books to people, tallits, tefillins and everything they needed. When my wife fell ill, the community helped me with food and medications. Lea died in 1996 and the community made arrangements for the funeral. My wife was buried in the Jewish sector of the town cemetery in Uzhgorod according to Jewish traditions. The old Jewish cemetery was closed long ago. The cemetery is not far from our house and I often visit the grave. On the anniversary of Lea's death I recite Kiddush at the synagogue and treat everybody with honey cake. The rabbi demands that the treatment is kosher. Of course, it's hard to do so. I take vodka with me and my daughter-in-law makes honey cakes and strudels.

I've traveled to Israel twice recently, I visited my daughter, grandchildren, saw my relatives and friends. Israel made an unforgettable impression on me. It's an amazing country and there are amazing people living in it. I was very happy and touched that they love their country and believe it to be an honor to serve in the army defending their country. I was very sorry that I was not destined to live in Israel. Now it's too late for me to think about it, but I'm very happy that my daughter and grandchildren are citizens of Israel.

I go to the synagogue three times a week: on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. People also get together at the synagogue on Friday evening, but it's difficult for me. I cannot see with one eye and it's hard for me to get home in the dark. I am used to walking keeping my head high, but now I have to look down when walking. I am often called to the Torah – they show respect to my age. We celebrate all Jewish holidays. I confess I haven't fasted on Yom Kippur for a long time since Lea died. My family convinced me that I cannot do it due to my health condition, but this time I fasted and I managed all right. Nothing bad happened.

In 1999 Hesed was established in Uzhgorod. They take a lot of efforts to revive the Jewish life in Subcarpathia. In Hesed there are Hebrew clubs and clubs where they teach Jewish history and traditions. People of different ages – young and old people attend them. There are studios of Jewish dancing and singing, literature studio, a club for elderly people and many interesting events in Hesed. Hesed takes care of the most unprotected: old people and children. They receive food

packages and those who are in poor condition have packages delivered home. Visiting nurses take care of them. There is a canteen in the Hesed where old people can have a meal, read and discuss newspapers and just talk. There is a summer camp for Jewish children where they take a rest and also learn to be Jews and study foreign languages. Life is very interesting in the camp and children always look forward to summer vacations. Hesed rents two wards in the hospital of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the best in the town. Everybody who needs a medical examination or treatment, can stay in this hospital. I also stayed there once, but I don't like hospitals. I think, it's much better for health to have a good laugh, say a joke, have a glass of homemade wine than swallow pills. Of course, I am happier than many others. Three generations of my family live with me: my son, granddaughter and great granddaughter. They fill the house with life and I get younger with them.

I still like going to the woods looking for branches and snags. Sometimes I draw still life. I do exercises and go for walks. My great grandchildren often accompany me. I try to do what I can for the community and Hesed. I made a big Jewish calendar in the past in Hebrew. There are also Russian names of months on it so that a person who doesn't know Hebrew could still find the date of the holidays. There are sights of Israel on each page. It is also indicated which part of the Torah is supposed to be read. 7 people are called to the Torah on holidays, fewer on Sabbath and on weekdays, and every time there is another section from the Torah to be read. Now I need to make another calendar before Rosh Hashanah for next year. It's hard work for me considering that I can only see with one eye, but people need it to be done and I enjoy working on it.

Of course, I wouldn't say that since Ukraine became independent anti-Semitism disappeared, but now Ukrainian laws allow to struggle against it. Also everyday anti-Semitism occurs, though not so often as it used to. Of course, it's hard to believe that anti-Semitism in Ukraine will disappear one day, but one cannot help hoping for it.

Glossary:

[1] Trianon Peace Treaty: Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on 4th June 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries concerned. The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary). The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia). Hungary lost 67.3% of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4% of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian Regimes.

[2] Neolog Jewry: Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into to (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

[3] Kuk (Kaiserlich und Koeniglich) army: The name 'Imperial and Royal' was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated

from the dual political system. Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name 'Imperial and Royal'.

[4] Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie): Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

[5] First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938): The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

[6] Maccabi World Union: International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

[7] Hungarian era (1940-1944): The expression Hungarian era refers to the period between 30 August 1940 - 15 October 1944 in Transylvania. As a result of the Trianon peace treaties in 1920 the eastern part of Hungary (Maramures, Partium, Banat, Transylvania) was annexed to Romania. Two million inhabitants of Hungarian nationality came under Romanian rule. In the summer of 1940, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, the Romanian government agreed to return Northern

Transylvania, where the majority of the Hungarians lived, to Hungary. The anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1938 and 1939 in Hungary were also applied in Northern Transylvania. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19th March 1944, Jews from Northern Transylvania were deported to and killed in concentration camps along with Jews from all over Hungary except for Budapest. Northern Transylvania belonged to Hungary until the fall of 1944, when the Soviet troops entered and introduced a regime of military administration that sustained local autonomy. The military administration ended on 9th March 1945 when the Romanian administration was reintroduced in all the Western territories lost in 1940 - as a reward for the fact that Romania formed the first communist-led government in the region.

[8] Hungarian occupation of Yugoslavia: In April 1941 Yugoslavia was occupied by German, Hungarian, Italian, and Bulgarian troops. Hungary reoccupied some of the areas it had ceded to the newly formed Yugoslavia after World War I, namely Backa (Bacska), Baranja (Baranya), Medjumurje (Murakoz) and Prekmurje (Muravidek). The Hungarian armed forces massacred some 2,000 people, mostly Jews but also Serbs, in Novi Sad in January 1942. The Hungarians ordered the formation of forced labor battalions into which all Jewish and Serbian males aged 21-48 were drafted. Many of them were sent to the Ukrainian front, others to Hungary and German-occupied Serbia (the infamous Bor copper mines). After the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944 the Jews of the area were deported to Auschwitz.

[7] Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary: Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

[8] 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.

[9] Yellow star houses - Yellow star houses: The system of exclusively Jewish houses which acted as a form of hostage taking was introduced by the Hungarian authorities in June 1944 in Budapest. The authorities believed that if they concentrated all the Jews of Budapest in the ghetto, the Allies

would not attack it, but if they placed such houses all over Budapest, especially near important public buildings it was a kind of guarantee. Jews were only allowed to leave such houses for two hours a day to buy supplies and such.

[10] Volksdeutscher (ethnic German): Early 18th century German colonists from southern German states (Baden-Wurtemberg, Bavaria) who settled, on the encouragement of the Habsburg emperor, in the sparsely populated parts of the Habsburg Empire – especially in southern Hungary. Thanks to their advanced agricultural technologies and hard work they became some of the wealthiest peasants in Hungary. Most of them lived (and partly still live) in Tolna and Baranya counties in present-day Hungary, Baranja in Croatia, Voivodina in present-day Serbia and the Banat in Romania. After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, following World War I, many of them came under Yugoslav and Romanian rule on the territories disannexed from Hungary on the basis of the Trianon Peace Treaty.

[12] Gulag: The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

[13] Iron Curtain: A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

[15] Keep in touch with relatives abroad: The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

[16] Victory Day in Russia (9th May): National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

[17] 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'.

[18] Kolkhoz: In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

[19] Doctors' Plot: The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

[21] 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.

[22] 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.

[23] Enemy of the people: Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

[24] 1956: It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

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

[26] 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.

[27] Perestroika (Russian for restructuring): Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mihaly Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.