Natan Shapiro

Natan Shapiro
Lvov
Ukraine
Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya
Date of the interview: December 2002

Natan Shapiro and his wife Tsylia live in a two-room apartment that still shows of wealth in the past. They have nice furniture bought during the Soviet regime, carpets and nice dishes. Natan is a short gray-haired man with smiling eyes. He is lame – in his early childhood he was injured and has been an invalid since then. Natan makes the impression of a very reasonable and reserved man. One can tell that he is a man that knew how to reach his goals. He stayed calm talking about his life. Only when telling about his brother Jacob that perished during the war and his daughter Raissa that died he tried to hide tears in his eyes.

My family comes from Zhytomir region. My mother's parents, Faidysh and Hanna Gutman, lived in the village of Ekaterinovka near Narodichi, 200 kilometers from Kiev. They were born and lived in this village like all other farmers – they worked hard to make their living, keeping a cow and working in the farm field and kitchen garden.

They were poor and had many children that began to work in their early childhood. Giving education to their children was out of the question – the family lived from hand to mouth.

Faidysh and Hanna were very religious: they observed all Jewish traditions, followed the kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and other Jewish holidays. There were three or four Jewish families in the village. There was no synagogue or cheder. Jews prayed at home as a rule and went to the village of Narodichi where there was a synagogue only on major Jewish holidays because this was far, about 15 kilometers from Ekaterinovka. They raised their children to be religious and respectful to traditions.

My mother's older sister Rachel was born in 1875. She died of tuberculosis before the revolution [1]. Her son, Isaac Kofman, graduated from the Pedagogical Institute and University in Kiev and his son, Roman Kofman, became a famous musician. He is the conductor of the Ukrainian Symphonic Orchestra of chamber music now.

My mother's second sister, whose name I don't know, moved to America at the beginning of the 20th century. My mother had no information about her.

I knew well my mother's sister Surah, or Sonia, as she was called in the family. She was born about 1880. Her husband, Joseph Feldman, was a blacksmith. They lived in Korosten and had three daughters and a son – Munia.

Surah's husband Joseph died shortly before the Great Patriotic War [2] and Munia was recruited to the army. He was at the front and got married after the war. Now Munia and his wife live in Moscow. Aunt Sonia and her younger daughter Manya went into evacuation in Uzbekistan in 1941.

Sonya died while in evacuation and Manya returned to Korosten after the war. She died in 2001.

My mother's younger sister Mikhlia, her husband and children lived in the village of Lipkovichi near Korosten. Her husband, Shmulik Feldman, Joseph's brother, was an agent at a salvageable materials office. He traveled to neighboring villages to exchange various haberdashery goods for waste paper and rags.

Mikhlia and Shmulik had three children: sons Boris and Faidysh and daughter Riva. Mikhlia's sons were klezmer musicians– they played at Jewish weddings.

In the middle of the 1930s Mikhlia became a widow. Her older son Boris met a girl from Samarkand, married her and moved to her home town of Samarkand. Her younger son Faidysh went to the front at the very beginning of the Great Patriotic War.

Mikhlia failed to evacuate. When the fascists were close to the village Mikhlia and her 17-year-old daughter left their village. They walked a few dozen kilometers before they understood that the Germans were all around. Mikhlia and Riva returned to their village. They stayed quietly in their house until their neighbor discovered that they were home.

This Ukrainian neighbor and Mikhlia's family got along very well before the war – they greeted each other on holidays and on Pesach Mikhlia brought them matzah and they brought their Jewish neighbors Easter bread at Easter. When the fascists occupied the village this neighbor went became a policeman. He took Mikhlia and Riva out of the house, gave them spades and ordered them to dig a deep pit in their own yard. After that he buried them alive.

Other neighbors told Faidysh about what happened when he returned home from the war. The policeman that killed his mother and sister so brutally left with the German army. Faidysh lost his leg during the war and was an invalid. He lived in Korosten and died in the mid-1990s.

My mother's sister Rachel, Sonia and Mikhlia and their families observed Jewish traditions and celebrated all Jewish holidays. My mother's older sister Rachel was the most religious one of them. They always lit candles at Sabbath, fasted at Yom Kippur and had matzah at Pesach. I don't know where they got it from. I don't think they could follow the kashrut during the Soviet period – there were no kosher products at that time, but they didn't mix meat and dairy products for sure.

In 1893 my mother's mother died at childbirth. Boris, who was born then, was raised by his older sisters. Grandfather Faidysh died shortly after his wife passed away. My mother told me how hard life was treating them – her sisters took any daytime jobs and my ten-year-old mother stayed at home looking after the baby. My mother dipped bread in sweet water and gave it to the baby instead of milk.

Boris was my mother's favorite. I don't know what he was doing before the revolution of 1917, but after the revolution he worked in the system of consumer services. During the Great Patriotic War Boris and his wife were in evacuation. Their daughter Bronia Gutman, a medical nurse, was recruited to the army and was a nurse on a sanitary train throughout the war. Boris died in Korosten in 1975, Bronia died in 2001.

My mother, Gutl Gutman, was born in Ekaterinovka in 1883. She didn't get any education – she became an orphan at ten. At 13 my mother went to other people's homes to do laundry, cleaning or babysitting.

My mother married Moisey Kipnis, a poor Jewish man who lived in the same village, when she was very young – she had just turned 17. They had a traditional Jewish wedding in Narodichi where the bride and bridegroom stood under a chuppah in the synagogue. After the religious ceremony they went to Ekaterinovka with their few guests.

My mother moved to live in her husband Moisey's house. Moisey had horses and a cart and made his living by providing transportation services. Moisey and my mother had two children: Bronia, born in 1910, and Jacob, born in 1913. Shortly after Jacob was born Moisey caught a cold and died.

My mother lived unmarried for few years and then she married a widower 20 years older than herself. She met him through matchmakers, which was customary for Jews. Her husband, Isaac Shapiro, was my father. At her second wedding my mother also stood under the chuppah in Narodichi. My mother's relatives welcomed Isaac into the family and then the newlyweds left for the village of Didkovichi where my father came from.

My father was born in a town in Zhytomir region [about 170 km from Kiev] in 1865. There were quite a few smaller towns with a Jewish population and I don't know more details about where exactly he was born. I don't have any information about his family.

He had two children with his first wife: I never met his son. As for his daughter, Haya-Surah, I met her by chance after the war. She lived in the Crimea with her family and came to her daughter's wedding in Korosten. That was where I met my stepsister and kept in touch with her until she died in 1980.

I was born on 15th April 1918.

My father was a melamed, a Jewish teacher. He went from one Jewish family to another teaching their children. In winter 1920 he caught a cold. When he reached home he had a fever. He stayed in bed a few days and then he died.

I was a little older than one year at the time. Therefore, I don't remember my father and there were no photographs for me to know what he looked like. My mother said that he observed Jewish traditions strictly: he prayed every day with his tefillin and tallit on and read old books in Hebrew. He was a very wise man and often other Jews came to ask his advice.

My mother became a widow again with three children. It was a hard period of the civil war [3], famine [4] and devastation. There were no pogroms [5] in the village – there were only a few Jewish families – but bandits robbed villagers of whatever little they had.

Once, my mother told me that her brother Boris was taking his cow to a bull in a neighboring village. All of a sudden a bandit came out of the forest, took the rope and began to pull the cow. My uncle was a strong and big man – he took the white guard [6] gangster by his hand and squeezed it so hard that he let go of the cow. Then he snatched the bayonet of the bandit and stabbed him to death and continued on his way. There was nobody around and my uncle was beyond any

suspicion. Besides, he didn't tell anyone about what happened until many years later.

We were very poor. My mother took care of us and went to do daily work – cleaning and washing – for other people. I stayed at home alone since Jacob and Bronia went to school. Once she left me on the stove bench. I got bored of lying there. I decided to get off the bench, but I fell and injured my leg badly. There was no doctor or assistant doctor in the village. Someone advised my mother to make a bath of salt water for my leg, but it got swollen and I felt even worse. I was only three and a half years old, but because of the pain I remember this.

My second cousin studied at the Medical University in Kiev and he arranged for me to have treatment at the orthopedic institute. I had a surgery at the hospital that was unsuccessful – my leg huddled up. I had to stay in hospital for three years.

There were five other boys from Kiev in my ward. Their parents visited them every day bringing them books. They read those children's books to all of us. My mother visited me in hospital about once in two or three months. She couldn't afford to visit me more often. She sat on the bed beside me and cried. When I was released from hospital in three years' time I was an invalid.

I returned to our village in 1924. Life improved a bit. My mother and sister earned their living by sewing. The biggest value in the family was our 'Singer' sewing machine. My mother and sister made women's and men's clothes and all the villagers were their clients. They paid with food products: eggs, chicken or even a loaf of bread – my mother and sister were content with any pay they could get.

My mother came from a very religious family and we observed all Jewish traditions at home. And celebrating Sabbath was a must in our family! On Friday before Sabbath the house was cleaned thoroughly: my mother freshened up the floors with light clay, dusted our furniture, however few pieces we had, and changed the bed sheets.

On Friday morning my mother and sister cooked a festive dinner. It wasn't much, but my mother always tried to make it different from everyday dinner – she made delicious challah and pastries.

We washed in the sauna and put on clean clothes. When the first star appeared in the sky my mother said a kiddush and lit a candle in a beautiful silver candle stand. This candle stand and other religious accessories – tallit, teffilin and old thick books in Hebrew that were in a box – were left from my father. On Saturday we took a rest. Sometimes our Jewish neighbors came to see us: adults had tea and talked and children played in the yard.

We also had kosher dishes for Pesach that my mother took down from the attic before Pesach. My mother always saved to make festive food at Pesach. We brought matzah from Korosten and my mother made chicken broth and chicken. My mother conducted seder and told us about the history of the Jewish people.

At Chanukkah my mother always gave us some money. She fasted at Yom Kippur and celebrated all other holidays. My mother prayed at home, since there was no synagogue in the village. Once we went to visit my aunt Sonia in Korosten at Pesach. My mother went to the synagogue and we stayed with my aunt's children at home.

Later, when I went to school and became a pioneer [7] I gave up celebrating Jewish holidays. I was afraid that my schoolmates wouldn't quite understand my religiosity. On the other hand, I loved my mother and hated to be disobedient, so I celebrated Sabbath with her and tried to follow the kashrut. However, we, children, didn't fast – our mother said it wasn't mandatory for us, especially since we didn't usually have enough food in ordinary life.

In 1925 I went to the Ukrainian school in the village. There were no Jews in my class. My classmates treated me all right, but I still felt myself distant from them. I felt especially lonely after my brother Jacob, or Yasha as I called him, left to Korosten after finishing school in 1927. He finished lower secondary school in our village [7 years] and he could only get professional education in Korosten. There was no educational establishment in the village to continue education – and Korosten was a bigger town with more opportunities. Yasha went to Korosten and became an apprentice to a locksmith that had a private business. He became this locksmith's apprentice and lived in his house.

I loved my brother and missed him a lot. I dreamed of finishing school and going to a big city like Kiev. I studied well and enjoyed being at school. My Ukrainian teachers treated me very well. I often got ill and they visited me at home.

There was no anti-Semitism in the village. All villagers liked my mother and always tried to help her, especially after she became a widow. However, we were still strangers. For example, when Ukrainian guys got drunk celebrating their recruitment to the army they went to break windows in Jewish houses. We installed strong oak shutters on the windows and shut them every time there were celebrations in the village.

I became a pioneer at school. My sister Bronia conducted the ceremony – she was secretary of the Komsomol unit [8] of the village and an active Komsomol member. Sometime later Henry Fridland, an educated Jewish guy, came to the village to hold the position of secretary of the village council. There were few educated people at that time and they were valued highly. The position of chairman of the village council was electoral, but the secretary was appointed by higher authorities. Henry met my sister. They worked together and had common interests.

In 1929 Bronia married Henry Fridland. They had a Komsomol type of wedding. Young people from the village came to the party and the chairman of the village council and secretary of the party organization made speeches. There was a samovar and pastries on the table. My mother insisted on a traditional Jewish wedding, but Henry and Bronia didn't even wish to discuss this subject.

In early 1930 my mother's sister Sonia and he husband Joseph insisted that we moved to Korosten for the reason that life was more difficult in the village and besides, there was no place for us, children to continue our education. We couldn't make up our mind for some time – it was difficult to leave the house for Korosten where we had no place to live.

Joseph built a foundation of a house for us near his house and insisted that we moved. In fall 1930 our family moved to Korosten. At the beginning we lived in the house of Sonia and Joseph. By the summer of 1931 Joseph, my brother Jacob and Henry, my sister's husband completed the construction of our house.

There was a room for Bronia and her family in this house: she and her husband had children already. My brother and I had a room, there was also my mother's bedroom and a small dining-room. I went to a Russian secondary school in Korosten. There was a Jewish school in Korosten, but it would have been difficult for me to study there. We spoke Yiddish at home, but still I began my studies at a Ukrainian school.

Korosten was quite a big town – about fifty thousand people. The majority of the population was Jewish: Jews were shoemakers, carpenters, tailors, watchmakers, locksmiths, cabinetmakers, barbers. There were also Jewish teachers, doctors and musicians that played in the Jewish orchestra in the Cultural Center.

There was a big synagogue in Korosten and on Saturday my mother, Sonia and Joseph went there. On Jewish holidays our big family got together in Sonia's big house. My uncle Joseph conducted seder.

As soon as we settled down in our big house my mother and sister took to sewing and my brother Jacob became an apprentice for a locksmith at the 'October forgery' plant. Our life was just beginning to improve when the period of famine began in 1932. We starved and suffered a lot. Henry took Bronia and the children to his parents in Malin – they kept livestock and could make ends meet.

My mother and Aunt Sonia often went to Kiev by train to buy bread and sell it in Korosten. They stood in lines a whole night. Once when they left and I was alone at home I went to bed, but heard somebody scratching on the window. I saw a dark silhouette of a man that was trying to get into the house through the window. He must have known that there were no adults in the house and that I was alone.

There were many robbers at that time that even murdered people for a piece of bread and there were cases of cannibalism. I got very scared and began to shout in a low voice, 'Who's there?' The man left. When Yasha returned from his night shift I was sitting at the table holding an ax. Yasha brought some food – they received food at the plant and he tried to bring some food for me. Sometimes public activists from the plant brought pies stuffed with peas or cabbage to school. They were sweeter than cakes.

I finished the 8th grade in 1935 and wrote a letter to Postyshev [9], 2nd secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine. People said that Postyshev was a kind and sympathetic man and they often requested him to help resolve their problems. I sent him a long letter with the description of my story: my invalidity and illness. I also wrote that I wanted to continue my studies.

Some time afterward a letter from Postyshev arrived addressed to the town department of public education. There was also an assignment for me to go to the orthopedic institute in Kiev. My mother and I and the manager of the town department of public education went to Kiev.

I saw the city of my dreams again. I saw military marching along Kreschatik [the main street in Kiev] – there was no holiday but they were marching before going to another course of training. We walked through the city for several hours before we went to see a doctor.

I had to stay in hospital for a long time. I had a few surgeries to straighten my leg, but it was still shorter than my other leg. I also had an orthopedic shoe made in Kiev that made walking easier for me.

I missed a whole year at school and decided to go to work and study in the evening school like my brother did. My mother worked at a pharmacy. Although she had no education she learned to make distilled water at a special unit and weigh powders for making medications.

My mother wanted me to work with her, but I was not interested. Our relative, my father's cousin Zalman, organized an accounting course in Korosten and admitted me there free of charge. Upon finishing the course I practiced at the post office where Henry was chief accountant. In 1937 I became an accountant in the military trade department where I worked until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War in June 1941.

In 1937, at the height of the period of Stalin's repression [10], the director of the military trade department and chief accountant were arrested. It was hard to work – people reported on each other and colleagues began to be afraid of one another. At this period my mother's younger brother Boris Gutman, who was the director of the industrial trade office, was arrested. He was released after a few months, but he wasn't restored in his party membership or in his previous position.

My brother Jacob also had problems at that time. He became a member of the Communist Party in 1935 when he worked at the plant. The regional party committee appointed him as chairman of the 'selpo' – village trade association [network grocery of shops]. He was also secretary of the party unit of the village and took part in dispossession of farmers [11]. Someone even shot his gun at him one night, but only injured his arm.

In 1935 my brother was fired and expelled from the Party. Someone reported on him – he was falsely accused of dishonesty and bribing. An anonymous letter was enough at that time to accuse a person and fire him from work. There was no way to prove that you were innocent.

Shortly afterward he was recruited to the army and sent to serve in the Far East. My brother didn't agree with his being expelled from the Party and wrote requests to the central committee of the Communist Party in Moscow. He was restored in the Party.

My mother begged him to return and I joined her in this urge. He demobilized and returned home at the end of 1940. He became a human resources inspector at the human resources department in Korosten. In March 1941 the military registry office sent him to take a training course in coding in Lutsk.

That was where he was when the war began. All cadets were given the rank of lieutenant and sent to the front. He was appointed to the railroad troops and retreated with them to Korosten. When he reached Korosten he ran home, but the house was locked – we had left it. He took a small pillow for the memory – it was called 'dumka' [thought] – that our mother had embroidered and left.

Shortly afterward the Germans occupied Malin and Korosten. My brother and 15 soldiers and officers of his military unit were captured by the Germans. They were locked in a wooden shed and there was a German guard near the shed. The shed had no foundation.

The officers tore off their straps so that the Germans couldn't recognize their rank in case the Germans took them to interrogation in the morning and all captives began to dig a sap throwing the soil inside the shed to keep their plan secret from the Germans. When the sap was ready a few of them got outside and stabbed the guard with that same knife that they had used to make a sap.

All of them escaped, but only five of them managed to get to the Soviet troops. They went through the woods and all their food was what they could get in the forest: mainly these were berries. Jacob and our other militaries covered a distance of over 400 kilometers. They reached Chernigov where there was a sanitary train where my cousin Bronia was a medical nurse. She saw my brother in town by chance. She told us this story after the war.

This was the last information about my brother. He didn't return from the war. Around 1947 we received a notification that he was missing. On the basis of this certificate my mother got an addition of a few rubles to her pension.

We evacuated: my mother and I, Bronia, Henry, who was released from the army and their three children – Lyonia, the oldest, born in 1929, Rachel and Misha, the youngest, born in 1939. We hired a horse-drawn cart to get to the station and on 3rd July we got on a train heading to the East.

The train was bombed while people were getting on it. Many people were killed. Little Misha shook his finger at the plane saying, 'Don't bomb us. Don't kill my mother.' We were lucky to survive. We got stuck in Malin for several hours until the railroad track was repaired.

Uncle Boria was waiting for us in Malin. He had evacuated his family before and he himself evacuated much later. We said good-bye to him. He gave us a bowl of sour cream – a buttery in Malin was destroyed and people took as much as they could take with them. I shared this sour cream with other people in our railcar.

We got to the station of Vorozhba near Kiev. The train stopped giving way to the trains that headed to the front. We didn't know how long we had to wait. My mother went to wash children's underwear taking advantage of this occasion and I went to fetch some water. All of a sudden an air raid began and a few trains at the station left. My mother and I tried to run to catch our train, but I could move only very slowly without my artificial limb and when we got to the track where our train was supposed to be we only saw its tail. Our belongings, however few, documents and my orthopedic shoe were in this train.

After some time we managed to get on an open platform of a military train. It was getting cold at night. A woman gave me her cotton jacket to keep warm. Then during one of the stops the train made it to a place where there was a train with evacuated people that headed to the East and we were allowed to board it.

The only thing we had was the kettle that I had with me when I went to fetch some water. My mother didn't let me get off the train when it stopped. Our fellow travelers fetched us water, soup or tea – whatever was available – in this kettle.

It was a long trip. The train stooped near Penza in Russia, 1500 kilometers from home. We were ordered to get off the train since it was supposed to take the wounded soldiers from the front. The locals took us to their villages on their carts. My mother and I and another family stayed overnight

in a ‘kibitka’ [a hut] without windows or doors. We were given half a loaf of bread. It was cold at night and we were scared of the wolves howling.

We stayed there two or three days before I went to look for a job or a place to stay. I found a place to live in the village of Olenevka, Kondylskiy district, Penza region. There was a big Soviet farm some five kilometers from the village where I was hired as an accountant. My mother worked helping with the weeding of beetroots in the village. She was used to hard manual worked and she was doing all right.

I met Joseph Koenigsman, a Jew from Estonia, a veterinary, in the village. Doctors had advised his wife to change the climate and they moved to the southern steppes around 1939, after the Baltic Republics joined the USSR [12]. I worked and stayed overnight in the office. Joseph visited me every evening. We read newspapers and discussed news from the front.

Once he came to the office and told me to take my pillow and blanket and move to his house. His family was kind to me and when they heard that my mother was in the village they told me to bring her to their apartment. They kept livestock: chicken, geese and ducks and we had plenty of food.

Every evening after work I brought some bread to the station hoping to meet someone that could give me some information about my sister. I didn’t meet anyone, but just gave this bread to other people that were going into evacuation.

In October 1941 the fascists came close to Moscow. We decided to move farther to the east – to Middle Asia. Our landlords, Joseph and Linda, were in Penza – Linda was injured when she fell from the cart on the way and was taken to hospital. Joseph was with her to take care of her.

My employers felt reluctant to let me leave work, but I explained that I had to find my cousin and her children. I wrote a warm thankful letter to our landlords. We locked the house and left.

We reached Djambul, Kazakh SSR, Middle Asia, 2500 kilometers from Kiev. It was overcrowded and we spent a few nights under benches in a park. I went to the employment agency where they told me that there was vacancy of an accountant at the tax commission in the district center of Mikhailovka. A senior inspector came from there to take my mother and me to the town. We were welcomed warmly – we got a delicious lunch and were taken to the apartment where we were to stay.

I was doing well at work and my management valued me high. I was responsible for collection of taxes. Since I was a Komsomol member I was sent to distant villages. I rode on a horse regardless of my invalidity. I went to a distant village – a German colony [13]. German families were deported there from various corners of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s [14]. Of course they didn’t want to pay military taxes to contribute to our victory over Germany.

Chairman of the collective farm [15] gave me a horse-drawn cart and a cabman and I made the rounds of all German houses telling them to come to the meeting. I took the floor at the meeting telling people how important it was to pay the tax to contribute to the victory. One German said, ‘I have no money. I’d rather go to an aryk [artificial channel] and get drowned.’ I replied that since it was hot there was no water in the aryk and he should better find money to pay the tax.

In the morning all families brought money to my office. I packed this money, about 40 thousand rubles, into my military bag that I got from my brother and I took this money to Djambul. The deputy director of the regional inspection office from Kishinev valued me highly and wanted to take me with him after the war.

My mother and I were trying to find my sister. I kept writing letters to all towns where she might have been. I also wrote to Buguruslan where the central evacuation agency was located. It kept information about all people in evacuation. We were lucky – at the end of 1943 we received a letter from Buguruslan. It said that my sister and her family stayed at Kinel railway station near Kuibyshev.

I took a leave from work and set out on my way to find her. I took a 10 kilo bag of dried bread with me. I obtained a letter from the district executive committee requesting all Soviet state and party authorities to provide assistance to me with food and in my search.

When I saw my sister I didn't recognize her – so starved they were. Misha, the youngest had starved to death a month before I came. He begged his mother for a piece of bread when he was dying. I stayed with my sister for a month. Then my brother-in-law quit his job and we set out on our way to where my mother and I were staying. Henry became an auditor in Mikhailovka and our life wasn't too bad.

We tried to observe all Jewish traditions in the evacuation: my mother didn't do anything on Saturday, made the Saturday meal on Friday and fasted on Yom Kippur.

We were homesick. We had no information about Yasha, but we were hoping that he was alive and would search for us. Kiev was liberated in November 1943 and I submitted a request to obtain a permit to go back home.

At that time my management set a package of my documents to Moscow to be processed to issue me a bonus for my excellent work. I didn't wait until I got this bonus: on 20th April 1944 we left for Korosten. The deputy director was trying to convince me to go to Kishinev with him, but we were eager to go home.

Our trip back was comfortable – we went by passenger train and had enough food with us. We arrived in Korosten at the beginning of May 1944. Our house was gone – a Ukrainian man had removed it with the foundation to the outskirts of the town where he lived. My neighbor, who was in conflict with this man, told me about it. I sued this man in court, but my neighbor didn't want to witness against his friend. He told me that he made up with his friend and changed his mind about witnessing in court. The court didn't satisfy my request.

My mother and I and my sister's family settled down in an abandoned house on the outskirts of Korosten. When we repaired it I caught a cold that resulted in pneumonia. We managed to get sulfidin that was hard to get at that time and I recovered.

When the military trade office was established I went to work there as inspector at the human resources department. This was my brother's position and I had an illusion that if I worked there he would return from the front. In 1945 Bronia Gutman demobilized. She told us about my brother.

In the military trade office I was made responsible for the organization of the manufactured goods association. It was very difficult – there was no equipment necessary for this association or anything else that was necessary. I went around the neighboring towns to look for what I could get. My mother's sewing machine – my mother took it with her into evacuation – gave a start to the sewing production shop. Gradually I organized the operation of the association that had few shops and was appointed as director of this association.

We had a great team at work. On 1st May and October Revolution Day [16] we went to parades with our families and then our photographer took a photo of all of us in the yard of our association.

In 1948 director of our trade association told me that it was time for me to join the Party. Key personnel were supposed to be in the Party. I became a candidate to the Party and then a member of the Communist Party. My mother accepted this with understanding regardless of her religiosity.

In 1949 I was sent to Moscow to take an advanced course of management. It lasted four and a half months and I finished the course with excellent results. I returned home to Korosten and took the position of director of the manufactured goods association. I was the director of this association for over 30 years.

In the early 1950s quite a few audits were arranged by higher authorities. They were commissions from higher state and party authorities. There were also representatives of the audit department to inspect our work, receipt of raw materials from storage facilities and shipment of ready products. They also audited our financial documents.

This was the period of anti-Semitism on the state level [17] and they were looking to find mistakes or drawbacks in my work to have a reason to fire me. However, they couldn't find anything – I did my job well and our association always took leading places in the socialist competition.

Stalin's death in 1953 was a real tragedy for all of us. It felt like the state wasn't going to survive without him and like life had stopped. The Twentieth Party Congress [18], denunciation of the cult of Stalin was a big surprise for us. We were all crying when a letter of the Central Committee of the USSR was read at the party meeting in our department, about the denunciation of the cult of Stalin, but at the beginning it was only disclosed to the party members – that was why it was called 'closed letter' meaning 'sensitive.' We were stunned to hear that Stalin was to blame for the death of dozens of thousands of repressed and executed people.

My personal life was good. I met a friend – Fania – in the evacuation. Fania came from Korosten. Our parents were hoping that we would get married when all of a sudden I met another woman. In fall 1946 I saw three pretty girls at my work. They all looked nice, but one of them was like my destiny walking to meet me. The girls went to have their photo taken at a photo shop of our association. When they left I asked our photographer to make an extra picture of the girls.

Korosten was a small town and soon I found out that the girl's name was Tsylia Potievskaya and that she lived in Malin. She came to Korosten on a visit. On that very night I went to meet Tsylia. I had never met a prettier girl in my life. She left home and we corresponded for about two months. Then I went to Malin to meet her mother and propose to Tsylia.

We had a small party and left by freight train to Korosten on 1st January 1947. We had a civil wedding ceremony at the registry office in Korosten. When Tsylia and I arrived Fania was at the station to look at Tsylia. In due time Fania married her cousin brother and became friends with my wife.

Tsylia was born in Malin, Zhytomir region, in 1924. Her father worked at a furniture factory. He died in 1936. During the war Tsylia and her mother were in evacuation in Yangiyul, near Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Tsylia's brother was at the front.

Tsylia's father wasn't religious while her mother observed all Jewish traditions and raised Tsylia religious. Although Tsylia was a Komsomol member it didn't interfere with her strive to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate holidays. She fasted at Yom Kippur. Tsylia didn't complete her secondary education due to the war. After the war she worked as accountant assistant and then as an accountant at the post office.

In Korosten we had a wedding party where we invited my friends. My mother wished we had a traditional Jewish wedding, but since I was a manager and religiosity was persecuted by the Soviet authorities we couldn't have it. If my management found out that we had a religious wedding I would have had problems at work and with my party authorities. I could have been expelled or reprimanded. Actually I was an atheist.

My mother tried to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate holidays after we returned to Korosten after the war. We had matzah at Pesach. In the first years after the war my mother was involved in charity – she collected money and clothes to help Jewish children that had lost their parents to the war.

My mother, Tsylia and I and my sister Bronia and her family lived together. We lived in the house on the outskirts of Korosten where we settled down after evacuation. We repaired it and added some space. We ended up with having four rooms and a kitchen with a stove stoked with wood. It served for heating and cooking food.

Gradually we bought furniture, my mother sewed curtains and we made our home a cozy place. Here were fruit trees planted around the house and my mother and sister grew greeneries in a small kitchen garden in the backyard of the house.

In 1947 our daughter Raissa was born and in 1956 our son Igor. Tsylia worked at the trade office for some time and then became an accountant at school. We submitted our documents to receive a new apartment, since we all lived in that old house that we found after the war.

In 1962 our trade department gave us three apartments in a new house: one apartment for my family, one for my sister's and a one-bedroom apartment for my mother. My mother died a year after we received our apartment. My sister Bronia died in 1984.

Of course, we couldn't raise our children religious in those years – we didn't observe Jewish traditions. Only my mother and Tsylia's mother told their grandchildren about Jewish traditions and gave them money at Chanukkah.

Our children studied well at school. Our daughter Raissa tried to enter the Medical Institute after finishing school, but it was impossible for a Jewish girl to enter a higher educational institution at that time. There was anti-Semitism on a state level and there was a secret direction of the government to admit no Jews to the most popular higher educational institutions and maximum 5 percent – to less popular ones [19].

My daughter failed to enter the institute and went to study at a medical school. She became a medical nurse. She married Igor Motylyov, a Jewish man from Lvov, and moved to live with her husband. After she had two sons my wife insisted that we moved to Lvov to be closer to our daughter. We exchanged our apartment for an apartment in Lvov in 1980 and stayed to live here.

My wife was a pensioner and I worked part time at the manufacture association in Lvov – I made boards for orders and medals. My daughter was diagnosed with lymphoganulomatosis. She didn't have a happy life with her husband. She lived the last years of her life with us. It is hard for me to talk about it I shall never forget how tragically she was dying. She died in 1986.

Raissa had two children: Pavel, born in 1972 and Alexandr, born in 1977. Pavel lives in Los Angeles, USA, and Alexandr lives in Israel. Pavel has a son – Rayan, my great grandson, and Alexandr has a daughter – Sopha. Our grandchildren write us and call on our birthdays. They invite me to visit them, but I can't afford the trip. However, we hope to see them one day.

Our son Igor entered the Forestry Academy in Leningrad. Anti-Semitism was not so strong in Leningrad during the Soviet power. Upon graduation he worked in Korosten and then moved to Lvov with us. Igor is married: his wife is called Irina, and they have two children, a son called Sergey and a daughter called Alyona.

Irina, our daughter-in-law, is Russian, but she studied Hebrew, knows and observes Jewish traditions and is a volunteer at the local department of Hesed. Alyona studies at the Jewish school. She sings and dances at the children's Jewish ensemble. She was on tour in Israel. Irina went there with her.

Regretfully, my wife and I have never been to Israel. In 1995 we submitted our documents to move to Israel, but we decided to stay due to terrorism and wars that shake the country. I hope to go there with our son's family, but taking this decision may take time. It's hard to change one's life at our age.

Perestroika [20] came as fresh wind for my wife and me. By that time I realized that we had lived our life in a cruel and merciless regime. We didn't have freedom of word or traveling or read books of our favorite writers. I wasn't a devoted communist and by that time I wasn't a party member any longer. After I became a pensioner I lost my party membership certificate and never recalled it.

I agree with my wife: we are very enthusiastic about the possibilities for people to travel and chose a place of living. There is freedom of speech. It is good that people got to know about the tragedy of Jewish people during the Great Patriotic War. There were books published that were not allowed before. The Jewish life has revived. Synagogues were opened and Jewish communities established. We can state proudly now that we are Jews.

Hesed [21] and the Jewish society Sholem Aleichem [22] provide medications for us. We attend clubs there to communicate with other Jews of our age. We also read Jewish newspapers. It is easier for us to be near people that support us in spirit, in particular, after our terrible loss – the death of our daughter. We celebrated Jewish holidays: Pesach, Purim, Yom Kippur and Chanukah. Igor and his family come to see us on holidays and we sit at the table all together. I also like to celebrate holidays in Hesed.

Glossary

[1] Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

[2] 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.

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

[4] Famine in Ukraine: In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

[5] Pogroms in Ukraine: In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

[6] White Guards: A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

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

[8] Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

[9] Postyshev, Pavel (1887-1939): political activist. In 1926 he became secretary of the Central committee of the Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) of Ukraine. In 1930-1933 secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), 1933 2nd secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) of Ukraine. In 1937-38 secretary of the Regional and Town Committee of the Communist party (of Bolsheviks) in Kuibyshev, candidate to members of the political bureau of the Central Committee. Repressed in 1934-38. Rehabilitated posthumously.

[10] Great Terror (1934-1938): During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

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

[12] Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania): Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In

June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

[13] German colonists/colony: Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

[14] Forced deportation to Siberia: Stalin introduced the deportation of certain people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

[15] Collective farm (in Russian 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.

[16] October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

[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] 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.

[19] Five percent quota: In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

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

[21] Hesed: Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

[22] Sholem Aleichem Society in Ukraine: The first Jewish associations were established in many towns of the country in the early 1990s. Many of them were called Sholem Aleichem Society. They had educational and cultural goals. Their purpose was to make assimilated Soviet Jews interested in the history and culture of their people, opening Jewish schools, kindergartens, libraries, literature and historical clubs.