Frida Shatkhina

Frida Shatkhina
Mogilyov-Podolskiy
Ukraine
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
Date of the interview: May 2004

Frida Shatkhina lives in a one-bedroom apartment in the center of Mogilyov-Podolskiy. The plant of food industry machine building constructed this 5-storied panel apartment building for its employees in the 1960s, and Frida's husband received an apartment here. Frida's husband died in 1992 and she lives alone. She has no children. Galina, an older Ukrainian woman, helps Frida about the house. She keeps it very clean, but the apartment itself is poorly furnished. Galina takes care of Frida. Frida is a short thin woman. She wears her gray hair in a knot. She is 90 years old. She gets tired easily, but she tells her story willingly. Regretfully, she's forgotten many things, but she still has an interesting story to tell and is fond of telling it.

My family background

My father's family lived in the village of Borovka, Chernevtsy district, Vinnitsa province [5 km from Vinnitsa, about 280 km from Kiev]. I never saw my father's parents. My grandmother died before I was born and my grandfather died when I was still a child. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Borovka.

I know that before the Revolution of 1917 1 my father's sisters and brothers lived in Borovka, but I never saw them and I don't know their names. Perhaps, my father mentioned them, but after so many years my memory fails me. Vinnitsa region was within the Pale of Settlement 2 before the revolution and almost every settlement was a Jewish town there. After the revolution my father's relatives moved to other towns or even countries, perhaps.

A small nameless dried out river crease divided Borovka village into two parts. Jews, who constituted almost half of its population, lived in both parts of the village. The rest of the villagers were Ukrainian. There were two synagogues in Borovka – one in each part. There was a separate room for women, who could listen to prayers through small windows. Jews mostly resided in the right-bank part of the village that was its center.

Most of the houses in Borovka were ‘mazanka’ houses. The word derives from the Russian term ‘mazat’ meaning apply clay on wooden carcasses of houses. In the 1930s the saman – air-brick – houses appeared. Air bricks were a mixture of clay and manure. Most of the houses had straw roofs. Only the wealthiest families had tin sheet roofing.

There was little land in the central part of the village and Jewish houses actually adjusted to one another. They only had sufficient land to grow some greenery. Ukrainians were farmers: they had vegetable and fruit gardens and fields.

Jews were craftsmen for the most part: tailors, shoemakers, barbers. There was also a blacksmith and a harness-maker. Jews owned stores: there were two or three fabric and garment shops and the rest of them were food stores selling daily consumer goods – salt, matches, sugar, cereals, tea, glass and wicks for kerosene lamps, etc.

Jewish families were religious. On Sabbath and Jewish holidays all men put on their black suits and black hats to go to the synagogue. Women attended the synagogue on the main Jewish holidays. Most men had beards, and the rabbi and shochet had payes. Married women wore wigs. All families celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home.

My father, Haim Shatkhin, was born in the 1880s. My father studied in cheder and this was all the education he got. He helped his father, who owned a small store. After my grandfather died, my father inherited his store.

My mother’s family lived in the Jewish town of Chernevtsy. After the revolution of 1917 it became a district town. I don’t remember my maternal grandparents. My grandfather, whose surname was Rozenberg, died shortly after my parents got married.

Of all my mother’s relatives I only knew her older brother, Haim Rozenberg, who lived with his wife Riva and their three children in Chernevtsy. Haim owned a small fabric store. However, this store must have been profitable. Haim was considered to be a wealthy man. My mother, Reizl Rozenberg, was born in 1886. She told me she came from a big family, but I didn’t know any of her brothers or sisters.

My mother’s parents were religious and raised their children religiously. My mother’s teacher was a melamed from the cheder. He taught my mother and her sisters to read prayers in Hebrew. I don’t know whether my mother could read or write in Hebrew. She couldn’t write or read in Ukrainian or Russian. My mother’s family spoke Yiddish at home. They also had a good conduct of Ukrainian to talk with their Ukrainian neighbors.

There was a big choral synagogue in Chernevtsy. After the revolution the cheder was turned into a four-year Jewish elementary school. There were two Ukrainian seven-year schools. There was a shochet in the town before World War II. There was a big market in the center of the village where the local villagers and villagers from neighboring villages sold their products. Bigger market days took place there twice a week.

During the revolution and the Civil War 3 several Jewish pogroms 4 happened. I can’t remember them. All I remember is that our Ukrainian neighbors always gave us shelter in their cellar. We, children, were ordered to keep silent in this cellar. Our family stayed safe from the gangs 5. Jews got along well with their Ukrainian neighbors.

I don’t know any details about how my parents met. I think there could have been matchmakers involved. Even when I was in my teens, all weddings were prearranged by shadkhanim, if both young people lived in the same town. Borovka is located in about 15 kilometers from Chernevtsy. My parents had a traditional Jewish wedding in Chernevtsy. Afterward my mother put on a wig.

After the wedding my parents moved to Borovka. My father had sold his parents’ house to have money for the wedding and the start of their marital life. My parents rented half of the house from an older Jewish couple. It was an ordinary mazanka house. There was a front door in the central part of the house and two doors in the fore room: the door on the left – to the landlords’ part of the house, and the one on the right – to our lodging.

There was a big kitchen and a Russian stove in it 6. The stove heated the kitchen and a room. We had a small yard. Our landlords grew onions, garlic and beans in their part of the yard. There was a shed where my mother kept wood for winter and chickens. My father worked in the store, and my mother was a housewife and also helped my father in the store.

In 1912 my older brother Boruch – Boris 7 in Russian – was born. I was born in 1914. I was named Frida after one of my grandmothers – I don’t remember which of them. In 1916 my second brother Abram was born. My younger sister Betia was born in 1919. My parents observed Jewish traditions, and both their sons were circumcised, as required.

My parents were religious like all Jews in Borovka. My father went to the synagogue on Sabbath and on Jewish holidays. He had a beard and wore a yarmulka or a hat. My mother went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays, like all Jewish women in Borovka. We always celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

On Friday morning my mother went to the market and when she returned, she made dough to bake bread and challot. She also cooked dinner. Meanwhile the dough rose and she made brown bread for the week to come and two wheat flour challot. When she took the bread out of the stove, she placed there a pot with chulent with meat, potatoes and beans for the next day. The chulent was still hot, when she took it out of the stove before lunch on Saturday.

In the evening my mother lit candles. She prayed over them and then we sat down to dinner. Nobody worked on Saturday. My father’s store was closed. No Jews worked on Saturday. My father went to the synagogue in the morning. When he returned, he told us stories from the Torah. We didn’t know Hebrew. We spoke Yiddish at home, and my father translated for us into Yiddish.

After the revolution the cheder in Borovka was closed. Wealthier Jews hired the melamed to teach their children Hebrew and prayers at home. My parents couldn’t afford it.

Pesach was the main holiday in our family. We started preparations a few months before the holiday. We ordered matzah at the synagogue. It was baked in the Jewish bakery in Chernevtsy and delivered to Borovka. Poorer families baked their own matzah, but we ordered ours. There was no bread in the house throughout all days of Pesach. The houses were newly whitewashed and window frames and shutters painted before the holiday.

Growing up

My mother sent me or my brother to the shochet to have him slaughter chickens for the holiday. My mother saved eggs for Pesach. She made chicken broth with dumplings from matzah flour, gefilte fish and various matzah and potato puddings.

We took the special Pesach crockery and kitchen utensils from the attic before Pesach. We only used it once a year. It was kept in a big wicker basket with a lid. Mama had separate dishes for meat and dairy products required by the kashrut. However, this was still our daily crockery, and it was taken to the storeroom for the duration of this holiday.

In the evening my mother covered the table with a white tablecloth. There were wine glasses put on the table, and a big one for the Prophet Elijah in the center of the table. On Pesach children also had some wine. My father reclined on cushions at the head of the table. He broke a piece of matzah into three smaller pieces and hid away the middle part. One of the children was to find this piece and give it back to father for a ransom. I don't remember if I ever managed to steal this piece of matzah.

My father read the Haggadah, and my brother posed the four traditional questions to him. He learned these questions by heart. Then we had dinner, and then my father and mother recited prayers and we sang merry Pesach songs. The front door was always kept open to let Elijah in.

Before Rosh Hashanah they blew the shofar at the synagogue for a whole month. The sound of it was loud and strident and was heard across the village.

Then came the Judgment Day, Yom Kippur. The fast started on the eve of this holiday. Adults fasted, and the children wanted to do as they did. Mama didn't allow us to fast, when we were young. She said missing one meal was quite sufficient. In the morning we went to the synagogue. It was required to pray until the first star appeared in the sky. Older children also went to the synagogue, and the younger ones stayed at home in the care of Ukrainian neighbors or acquaintances.

After Yom Kippur preparations for Sukkot began. Father made a sukkah in the yard. We, kids, assisted him fetching a hammer or a plank. When the sukkah was ready, we decorated it with green branches, flowers, ribbons. We also made decorations from chicken feathers. Each family tried to make their sukkah more beautiful than the others. There was a table installed in the sukkah, and the family had meals and prayed in the sukkah.

In winter we celebrated Chanukkah. Mama had a bronze channukkiyah where she lit one more candle each day. The children made the rounds of relatives and neighbors singing a song about Chanukkah. Relatives gave children Chanukkah gelt. We spent it on sweets and toys.

We also liked Purim, a merry holiday. In the morning all went to the synagogue. The children got rattles. When the rabbi mentioned the name of Haman, the villain, we had to make as much noise as possible to make it impossible to hear his name. There were many delicacies cooked. There was a custom to send treats to relatives, acquaintances and friends on Purim. Children made the rounds of houses, and when housewives returned empty trays, they put some small change on them. We celebrated holidays before the Great Patriotic War 8 and both synagogues operated.

My father kept his store for some time after the Civil War. It was probably too small to be attractive for authorities. My mother's brother also kept his business for some time. They did their business

themselves, and the authorities started expropriation of those who hired employees.

My brother went to school. I followed him two years later. After finishing the four-year Jewish school its pupils continued their studies in the Ukrainian school. My parents decided to send my brother and me to the Ukrainian school from the very beginning. We were fluent in Ukrainian and had no problems in this regard.

I liked school. I made new friends: Jewish and Ukrainian. There were quite a few Jewish pupils in my class. The teachers treated us in a similar manner, and there was no segregation at school. I have happy memories about school.

After school I hurried home to do my homework and housework. Mama spent much time in the store, and I had my home chores to do. I cleaned and did the laundry and cleaned vegetables so that my mother spent less time cooking. I also had to look after my sister, who was five years younger than me. And I also managed to play with my friends in the street and read a little.

We didn't have books at home. I borrowed books from the school library. I didn't become a pioneer 9 at school. They started admission from those, who had all excellent marks, and when it was my turn, I decided against it feeling hurt.

In 1924 my older brother Boruch fell ill with scarlet fever and died. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Borovka, and the funeral was according to all rules. Father recited the Kaddish over my brother's grave. Mama sat shivah for a week. She was alone since Father worked in his store, and my younger brother Abram and I had to go to school.

I finished the seven-year school in 1929. I was the oldest in the family: my brother and sister still went to school. I had to support the family and go to work.

In the middle of the 1920s Jewish and Ukrainian kolkhozes 10 were organized in Borovka. The Jewish kolkhoz 11 had a cow farm and farmlands growing grain and vegetables. I went to work in the field. During summer vacations my younger sister and brother also worked in the field to earn some money.

We got payment in fall after harvest time. We were paid a little money and grain and vegetables for our work. I wanted to buy a cut of fabric to make a dress so much, but there was too little money for anything. I decided I had to find a better-paid job, which was hard to do in Borovka.

Hard times came in 1932-33. Famine 12 came to Ukraine, and the situation in villages was much worse than in towns. Those, who had farmlands and vegetable gardens, were better off while we had just nothing. We starved. We picked berries, mushrooms and some roots in the woods. However, we all managed somehow, but my father. He caught a terrible cold in winter and was very weak.

In winter 1933 Father died. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery near his parents and my older brother Boruch. After he died the authorities took away his store from us. Mother decided we had to move to Chernevtsy to live closer to her brother.

My acquaintance in Chernevtsy was a communication operator at the post office. He said I could get some training to become a telephone operator. Mama, my younger brother and sister moved to

Chernevtsy. We rented two small rooms and a kitchen from a local woman. She was a single older Jewish woman. She lived in her house in one room.

My acquaintance helped me to get a job at the post office. It didn't take me long to learn the job of a telephone operator. There was no automatic dialing at that time. Telephone operators worked manually. There was nothing hard about this job, as long as we were attentive. I received salary and occasional food packages: flour, cereal, sunflower oil.

My brother Abram also went to work at the post office, and was trained to be a communication operator. A Vinnitsa communication school affiliate opened in Chernevtsy and my brother went to study there by correspondence. After finishing this school he was offered a job in 'Spetssviaz' [special communication] at the NKVD 13 office. His office was responsible for installation and maintenance of special communication cables.

My sister went to study at the one-year accounting course after finishing school. After finishing this course she entered the Accounting Faculty of the Financial and Economic College in Vinnitsa where she met her future husband. I don't remember his first name, but his last name was Solomon. He came from the village of Kalinovka near Vinnitsa. They got married in 1940 and Betia moved to live with her husband.

My brother married Sima, a Jewish girl from Chernevtsy in 1938. After the wedding he moved to his wife's place. They registered their marriage in a registry office and had a wedding dinner with relatives. They couldn't afford bigger celebrations at this hard time. In 1939 my brother's son Boris was born. He was named after our deceased older brother. In 1940 their daughter Raisa was born.

In 1936 arrests 14 began. They also happened in Chernevtsy. Some of our acquaintances were arrested. Of course, it was hard to believe that the people, whom we knew well, happened to be enemies of people 15, but we couldn't help believing it since we knew for sure that innocent people could not be arrested.

They didn't capture common people basically. They arrested communists, local officials. They might arrest those, who mentioned that life was hard or that there was lack of food. There were such people – innocent, but accused. We also understood that we could not say that an innocent person had been arrested, and all people around kept silent.

There was no anti-Semitism before the war, we didn't face any. Jews and Ukrainians had the same life. Sometimes my friends and I went to the cinema or attended lectures in the evening: we could afford such entertainment. We had a poor and difficult life, but everybody lived the same.

During the war

On Sunday 22nd June 1941 it was my turn to work on the weekend. I came to work in the morning, and my colleagues told me in secret that Germany had attacked the USSR, that there were battles in Belarus going on, and Kiev was bombed. Telephone operators were aware of many things: working at the telephone station we occasionally heard pieces of conversation.

Of course, I felt scared at once, but then I calmed down. Radio and newspapers had mentioned a possible war before, but always in the context that our army was invincible and that we would defeat the enemy on their territory. And of course, I believed this like everybody else did. We were

convinced that our army was the strongest, and our military equipment was the best. Nobody had any doubts that the war would last only a few days, or probably weeks.

I went home for lunch. My sister was visiting us. She was having lunch with Mama. We were having a chat, but I didn't tell them about the war not to spoil their mood. Only when leaving for work after lunch I told Mama and Betia that if they heard about the war, let them not panic since everything would be over pretty soon. And I left for work calmly.

We had a radio at home. They listened to Stalin's speech, who said that we would win. We believed this so much that we didn't even consider evacuation. My sister left home, and Mama and I didn't even think of moving away.

My mother remembered World War I, when she saw Germans. She said Germans were very polite and didn't hurt anybody. Numerous Ukrainian gangs during the Civil War were much worse. We didn't know about the brutality of fascists or that they were exterminating Jews.

There were no arrangements for evacuation in Chernevtsy, and people were taking their chances to leave on wagons or even on foot. We didn't even take an effort to leave. My brother was short-sighted, and wasn't recruited to the army. He stayed in Chernevtsy with his family.

Germans occupied Vinnitsa region shortly after the war began. Many of those, who had left Chernevtsy, had to come back since the region was encircled by German troops, and there was no chance to break through the encirclement. The Germans invaded Chernevtsy without a single shot, but they didn't stay. They formed the local Ukrainian police.

All Jews were staying in their homes. Shortly afterward a group of about 100 Jews was convoyed to the Jewish ghetto in Mogilyov-Podolskiy 16 by the policemen. The rest of the Jews were told to pack clothes and food for three to four days awaiting the order about departure to the ghetto.

However, the German troops left and were replaced by Romanians. They didn't send anybody to the ghetto: all Jews were staying in their houses. The situation was a little easier than when German troops were here. Of course, the Romanians also suppressed Jews, but not to such a great extent as the Germans.

The territory of the Vinnitsa region became the territory of Transnistria 17. There were ghettos in many villages and towns with local inmates and those, who came from Moldova 18 and Bessarabia 19. However, there was no ghetto or Jews from elsewhere in Chernevtsy. The curfew hours were established. Jews could only leave their house during the daylight and had to stay inside, when it got dark. They didn't allow having the lights on in houses, but later it was allowed to turn on the lights, but have heavy curtains on the windows so that no light was seen from the outside.

All Jews were to have white armbands with yellow hexagonal stars on them. The order dictated that those Jews who didn't have such armbands, were subject to execution for not following the order. However, I never had this armband on. I am a quiet and reserved person, but this order drove me so angry that I decided that I wasn't going to obey it, even for the fear of execution I decided not to obey. I was never captured, though the local police watched us closely and they knew that I was a Jew. None of them reported on me, vice versa – they were sympathetic.

The Romanians fired all post office employees, including my brother and me. We had to earn our living, so we worked for the local farmers: weeded their fields, earth potatoes or gather their crops. Mama made plain clothes for Ukrainian peasant women: frilled skirts and blouses and also, altered old clothes for children. They paid her with food products. Money was not valued. People changed things for food at the market. At times villagers brought us a bottle of milk or a few eggs charging us nothing for this.

Occasionally we heard rumors about mass shootings of Jews in neighboring towns. Thus, in August 1942, Germans killed all Jews of the town of Yaryshev located nearby. I don't know if there were any survivors. There were no mass shootings in our town. Of course, Romanians happened to kill people, but those were their captives, whom they captured after the curfew hours.

In general, Romanians were not as violent as Germans. They didn't take away our radios. While Germans were in Chernevtsy they ordered the locals to submit their radios to the town hall, but this happened before they were to leave, and when the Romanians came into the town, they didn't require following this order. There was a radio in all homes. We also had a 'plate'-shaped radio that we often listened to. However, Mama took it to a niche and covered it with a curtain, although this was not necessary.

We followed the combat actions. In summer 1943 we got a feeling that there was a turning point in the war. The radio hardly ever announced that our troops had left a settlement, but vice versa – our army was attacking. We heard that around February 1944 our forces started advancement in Vinnitsa region. This gave us hopes.

In late March 1944 we noticed that the Romanians hardly ever came into the streets of the town – there were only policemen around. One morning we saw the Soviet tanks coming into the town. There was not a single Romanian left in the town. We didn't even hear them leaving. The Soviet forces came into Chernevtsy quietly without shooting.

We ran out of our homes trying to come closer to soldiers, shake their hands and thank them. There was a field kitchen on the outskirts of the town inviting the locals to have boiled cereals with tinned meat that they were making.

We were so happy that we survived. Of course, we were not quite sure that the Germans wouldn't return to Chernevtsy, but we all hoped this wouldn't happen. And it didn't. Our peaceful life started in late March 1944.

Shortly afterward my brother and I returned to work at the post office. Life was gradually improving. On 9th May 1945 20 we got to know about the end of the war and that Germany had capitulated. All residents of our town got together in the main square. There was an orchestra playing and people were dancing, singing and greeting each other. This was the beginning of the peaceful life, there were food products supplied to stores and we were hoping for the better.

After the war

My sister Betia and her husband moved to Vinnitsa after the war. She went to work as an accountant in the State Bank department in Vinnitsa. In 1946 Betia's daughter Rita was born and in 1949 – her second daughter Maria was born.

I didn’t consider a marriage. I had to take care of Mama. There were no old age pensions paid at that time, and Mama had never worked in her life, she was a housewife, so she didn’t receive a work pension. I was the only breadwinner. Of course, this wouldn’t have been enough for living in a town, but in the village we quite managed.

I met my future husband, Isaac Brisman, a Jew, in Chernevtsy in 1960. He came on a long business trip from Mogilyov-Podolskiy. He worked as a postal worker. It was necessary to install cables for a new telephone station. Isaac stayed in Chernevtsy for over two years. One of my colleagues introduced him to me. We began to see each other occasionally.

Isaac was born in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1910. I don’t know anything about his parents. He probably told me about his family, but I can hardly remember anything. He was in communication forces at the front during the war. His wife and daughter stayed in Mogilyov-Podolskiy where they were in the ghetto. Isaac’s wife died after the war, and their daughter was raised by her relatives in Vinnitsa. Isaac could not take care of his daughter having to go on frequent business trips.

Before going home Isaac proposed to me. Of course, we didn’t have a Jewish wedding. We registered our marriage in a registry office and in the evening invited my relatives and friends to a dinner. Then Isaac left and I stayed in Chernevtsy. I couldn’t get a job in Mogilyov-Podolskiy and I didn’t want to be a housewife. Mama couldn’t move either due to her health condition.

Isaac went to work at the Kirov 21 plant of food industry machine building 17. He was a worker. He got a higher salary at the plant. His house was ruined during the war and he rented an apartment. The plant built a house for its employees. In 1966 Isaac received a one-bedroom apartment in this new house. His daughter was married and lived in Vinnitsa with her husband.

Isaac came to see me on weekends, and I visited him in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. We spent vacations together, walked a lot, went to the bank of the river. We often spent our vacations to refurbish the apartment, preserve fruit and vegetables for winter. I retired and moved into this apartment to live with my husband.

Mama died in 1962. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery in Chernevtsy, near my father’s grave. There was a Jewish funeral. My husband recited the Kaddish over her grave.

All postwar events in the USSR – the campaign against ‘cosmopolitans’ 22, the Doctors’ Plot 23 – went past me. Yes, there were some terrible publications in newspapers, but living in our small village, we didn’t feel like getting into details. It seemed to be happening so far away – in Kiev, Moscow, while we were having a quiet life. We were sure there were no cosmopolitans in Chernevtsy. People had trust in the only doctor in Chernevtsy – a local Jewish man, who was born and grew up in the town.

I remember the day of 5th March 1953, when the radio announced that Stalin had died. I was at work. Everybody was crying, there was not one person without tears in their eyes. It was scary. We were used that everything happening in the USSR was connected to Stalin’s name and we couldn’t imagine living without him. This was the only subject of discussions.

When Khrushchev 24 at the Twentieth Party Congress 25 denounced the cult of Stalin and spoke about the terrible things that Stalin and his associates had done, I believed it, but not to the end.

I never joined the Komsomol 26 or the Party. I believed in the ideas of communism and the Communist Party before the Twentieth Party Congress, but then it was all over. After the disappointment that the Twentieth Party Congress brought me I gave up any interest in politics. I don't care about it now either.

We common people know nothing but what we are told, and we do not decide anything. We cannot change anything in the life of the country. So why think about it?

I had the same attitude towards perestroika 27 that Mikhail Gorbachev 28 initiated in the late 1980s. They always promised us a lot, but nothing ever came out of these promises. Each leader of the country promised a better life, but nothing changed, only got worse.

My husband and I grew up in a religious family. After the war Jews didn't observe Jewish traditions so strictly. My husband and I didn't go to the synagogue. After the war the synagogues in Chernevtsy and Mogilyov-Podolskiy were closed, but there were prayer houses operating instead. Isaac and I didn't go to prayer houses either, but we celebrated Jewish holidays at home and tried to follow all rules.

On Pesach I bought matzah, and later I bought it. I cooked traditional food that Mama used to make: chicken broth with dumplings from matzah, gefilte fish and puddings. Isaac had a prayer book and he prayed at home. On Yom Kippur we fasted 24 hours. Even now I fast on Yom Kippur despite my age.

Of course, we celebrated Jewish holidays secretly. My husband and I celebrated Soviet holidays at work. At home we only celebrated the Victory Day, 9 May.

When in the 1970s numbers of Jews were moving to Israel, my husband and I didn't consider emigration. We didn't even discuss such a possibility. We are not fortune hunters and we've never been attracted by going to another country to live a different life. Many of our acquaintances left Chernevtsy and Mogilyov-Podolskiy then, but I still think that there were more staying here.

I didn't blame those who decided to leave. It's their own business. If a person decides something, it's better not to interfere with him. My brother and his family and my sister and her husband moved there. My sister's daughters and their families stayed here. We occasionally wrote each other, but not often. This correspondence could do no harm to us 29 – we were pensioners, and were not members of the party. However, there wasn't much to write about. We still correspond.

My brother's wife has passed away. My brother lives in an elderly people's home in Tel Aviv. My sister also moved to the elderly people's home after her husband died. They can see each other often. They are in good care and are both happy. My brother's children also live in Israel. They have their own families. My sister's older daughter and her family lives in Moldova, and the younger one – in Germany. We have no contacts.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union after perestroika Ukraine became independent and I was hoping for a better life. There are no material benefits, but the Jewish life revived in Ukraine. There is a synagogue and a Jewish community in Mogilyov-Podolskiy.

The community does much for the revival of the Jewry in Ukraine. It's the center of the Jewish life of the town. When my husband died in 1992, the community helped me with the Jewish funeral for

him. Isaac was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Mogilyov-Podolskiy. I am old, and it's hard for me to look after the grave. The community installed a gravestone and looks after the grave.

I know that the community makes arrangements for celebrating holidays and conducting meetings, but I do not go there. It's hard for me to leave home. Galina, a woman from the Evangelist society, helps me a lot. She lives with me and does housework. Our two pensions are sufficient for us to live on them. Galina is like family to me.

I don't care that I am a Jew and Galina is Christian. I believe that everything done in the name of God, all good things will be appreciated by the Jewish and Christian God. People must help each other, and getting an opportunity to do good to one's neighbor is happiness.

Glossary:

1 Russian Revolution of 1917
Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during 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 Jewish Pale of Settlement
Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

3 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 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.

5 Gangs
During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

6 Russian stove
Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

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

8 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 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.

10 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.

11 Jewish collective farms

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

12 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.

13 NKVD

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

14 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.

15 Enemy of the people
Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

16 Mohilev-Podolsk
A town in Ukraine (Mohyliv-Podilsky), located on the Dniester river. It is one of the major crossing points from Bessarabia (today the Moldovan Republic) to the Ukraine. After Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the allied German and Romanian armies occupied Bessarabia and Bukovina, previously Soviet territories. In August 1941 the Romanians began to send Jewish deportees over the Dniester river to Transnistria, which was then under German occupation. More than 50,000 Jews marched through the town, approximately 15,000 were able to stay there. The others were deported to camps established in many towns of Transnistria.

17 Transnistria
Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

18 Moldova
Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River and the Black Sea, also a contemporary state, bordering with Romania and Ukraine. Moldova was first mentioned after the end of the Mongol invasion in 14th century scripts as Eastern marquisate of the Hungarian Kingdom. For a long time, the Principality of Moldova was tributary of either Poland or Hungary until the Ottoman Empire took possession of it in 1512. The Sultans ruled Moldova indirectly by appointing the Prince of Moldova to govern the vassal principality. These were Moldovan boyars until the early 18th century and Greek (Phanariot) ones after. In 1812 Tsar Alexander I occupied the eastern part of Moldova (between the Prut and the Dniester river and the Black Sea) and attached it to its Empire under the name of Bessarabia. In 1859 the remaining part of Moldova merged with Wallachia. In 1862 the new country was called Romania, which was finally

internationally recognized at the Treaty of Berlin in 1886. Bessarabia united with Romania after World War I, and was recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic gained independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is now called Moldovan Republic (Republica Moldova).

19 Bessarabia

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

20 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.

21 Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934)

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

22 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.'

23 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.

24 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.

25 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.

26 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.

27 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.

28 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)
Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The

government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

29 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.