Raisa Gertzevna Shulyakovskaya

Raisa Gertzevna is a person of amazing energy, who, despite her advanced years, has preserved her lively mind, sense of humor and self-possession. Notwithstanding her ailment – approaching deafness and blindness, blood pressure problems and two broken legs – Raisa Gertzevna looks very good, takes care of herself and maintains an interest in life. Since her mobility is now limited, she suffers from a lack of communication, as she can't go to Hesed 1 as she did before. She walks with the help of a cart, which she pushes in front of her and leans upon; she spends all her time at home and tries to read with the help of a magnifying glass. Her granddaughter is a very busy person and can't spend much time with her. Raisa's pension is minimal and she lives very modestly. We became friends in the course of our meetings and are quite close. I often tell her, 'You are at such an age that you have to think more of yourself and take care of yourself.' And she replies, 'All my life I've lived for other people. That's the way I was brought up.'

My family background

I was born in 1912 in the town of Slutsk in Belarus. This town is located near the Polish border. All my relatives came from there. My paternal grandfather's name was Bentsian Naumovich Shulyakovsky. I know that there is a village named Shulyaki in Slutsk district and Grandfather Shulyakovsky's ancestors came from that place. I don't know whether they were religious or assimilated Jews, since they lived close to the Russians. We had no passports until 1932, so there was no indication of nationality 2.

My paternal grandfather was called Bentsian ben melamed in Hebrew, because he was a teacher. He taught arithmetic and Yiddish in a cheder. He wore a big beard and payes. He was very religious, ate kosher food, observed all Jewish traditions, attended the synagogue and prayed every day. Shulyakovsky was fanatically religious [Raisa means very zealous]. He was married twice. His first wife was my paternal grandmother. I don't know her first name. Her maiden name was Repina. She died very early, when my father was very young. That is why I don't know anything else about

her. She had a brother, who was a lawyer. I can't remember his name. We were friends with him, he came to visit us. After Grandmother's death, Grandfather married for the second time. His second wife must have died too. I don't know anything about her either. She had four children with my grandfather, two sons and two daughters: Grigory, Naum, Hanna, and another daughter, whose name I can't remember.

Grandfather lived alone when I knew him. He owned a house in Slutsk. He was reserved, had few friends and communicated mostly with people at the synagogue and with his family: with us and his children from his second marriage. Grandfather Shulyakovsky died before the war in 1934.

My father, Gertz Bentsianovich Shulyakovsky, was his elder son from his first marriage. We were great friends with one of my father's brothers, Grigory. When I studied in Leningrad [today St. Petersburg] between 1931 and 1937 and lived in a dormitory, he visited me and supported me financially. Later Grigory lived in the Crimea [today Ukraine] with his family. He had tuberculosis and he was advised to change climate. He wrote to me from that place during the war, 'The weather is spoiling,' in order not to write directly about the war beginning. Later he wrote, 'We are planning to leave,' and then he disappeared. My cousin [from Grandfather's second marriage] lived in Leningrad. She was ten years younger than me, she died already. She was a physician and worked at a polyclinic.

My maternal grandfather, Abram Kulakovsky, lived in Baslovitsy, a Russian village in Slutsk district. He was a peasant. He had a little house with small windows, earthen floor and a straw roof. He had seven daughters and a son. I can't tell you anything about them. The eldest daughter was my Mom. Grandpa lived in the village and not far from him lived the landowner, Volzhinsky. The landowner noticed that Grandpa managed to achieve proper crop rotation on a small plot of land and was able to feed his family. So he recommended him to another important landowner for the position of manager.

Later Grandfather Kulakovsky owned two houses: the old small one and a new nice big one. When Grandpa lived in Slutsk he sometimes took us to the village to show us the small house where they'd lived before, and we also saw his new house with a wooden floor, good roof and big windows. It was before the Revolution 3. There was neither electricity nor a water supply system in the village. They kept a cow. Grandpa Kulakovsky didn't wear a big beard, all in all, he could be called a secular man. Certainly he observed the traditions, but not to the extent my other grandfather did; he just celebrated the holidays.

Almost all of Grandfather Kulakovsky's daughters had Russian husbands. There was a blacksmith in that Baslovitsy village, a Jew named Pocherk, he was the only other Jew there. There was no national friendship [i.e. no relations were kept with other Jews]; they communicated as much with Belarusians. I remember how Grandpa brought me and my sister to the village, suddenly my sister started crying and I also began to cry. He asked her, 'Why are you crying?' and she replied, 'I want to go back home.' He asked me, 'Why are you crying?' and I said, 'Because Nina is crying.' Grandpa said, 'I will bring toothies to you.' And I thought, 'What toothies?' 'Toothies' were this Jewish blacksmith's children, they both smiled and showed their teeth. So we stopped crying.

My grandparents didn't have servants at home, but there were girls from the village, who sometimes helped them about the house. But it was short-term. It was a custom at that time. Later there was a 'period of housemaids' in this country, approximately in the 1920s-1930s. My sister

had a housemaid at home because she was at work all day.

During the Soviet times Jewish kolkhozes 4 were organized on landowners' land. A Jewish kolkhoz 5 was set up on landowner Volzhinsky's land and Grandpa Kulakovsky was invited to be chairman. A long time after I had grown up, the Kulakovsky family moved to Slutsk, I don't remember what year it was exactly. They had a nice country house with several rooms. We lived there for some time, because we had no house of our own. I don't really know what money they lived on. I have a picture of my grandfather with my sister Nina, his granddaughter. The picture was taken for no particular reason; she must have come to Slutsk and decided to have their picture taken. They didn't go to a photo studio; I think someone took the picture at home.

The Kulakovsky family as well as the Shulyakovsky family spoke 'jargon' with each other and with their children. 'Jargon' is something that is now called Yiddish – a little German, a little Russian. Grandfather Kulakovsky said about his age, '70 are mine, the rest is given by God.' I couldn't tell you his real age. He perished during the Holocaust, as did my Dad. When Slutsk was occupied in 1941, all old people, especially Jews, of course, were eliminated immediately.

I don't remember much about Grandmother Sarah Kulakovskaya. Her maiden name was Utekhovskaya. It is most probable that Grandpa Abram and Grandma Sarah were proposed to each other, because my mother's marriage was also arranged. Grandma brought up eight children. She was a very sick woman, she had emphysema, which my mother inherited, she was suffocating. She wore ordinary clothes for that time. She didn't wear a wig, but always wore a headscarf. She was just a regular grandmother. Our family didn't live with the elder generation, only for a short time, when I was little that is why I can't tell you more. Grandmother died at the age of 60 [in the 1920s].

My father was born in 1881 in the town of Slutsk. Dad's mother tongue was Yiddish. He also spoke Russian as well as Hebrew and later he learnt German on his own; he was a very talented man. Everyone else in our family also spoke Russian. Dad had only elementary education. He left home approximately at the age of 15 and continued his studies. He went to cheder as a child, as all Jewish kids did. Later he became an accountant and worked at the forestry. When a Jewish kolkhoz was set up on landowner Volzhinsky's land and Grandpa Kulakovsky was invited to be chairman, Dad worked as an accountant there and my mother worked as a milkmaid, so this was where they met.

My mother, Esther Abramovna Shulyakovskaya, nee Kulakovskaya, was born in 1888. Mom grew up in a village and she was used to the countryside labor. Mom also had only elementary education. She was taught by a village teacher at home. She didn't go to cheder, there weren't any in that village. She was proposed to my father as a wife. Most likely it was her parents' idea and it was a custom in those times. Mom was the eldest daughter in her family. She was married off at the age of 17. Mom never told me about her wedding. I was her fourth kid when she was 24 years old. She was married off because there were seven daughters in the family [it was hard to feed such a big family]. Before her marriage she worked as a milkmaid in the kolkhoz, later she kept her household. During the war in 1941-1944 6 she was with me in evacuation in Sverdlovsk. After the war Mom lived with us, she was sick a lot of the time and died in 1952.

My parents got married in 1905. I don't know what kind of wedding they had. They lived in Slutsk at first. They had four kids: Yefim, Lev, Nina and me, Raisa. My elder brother Yefim was born in 1907. He started to work as a tutor at the age of 13 or 14, as his teachers recommended him to

pupils who lagged behind. He visited them at home, taught them, received payment and gave it all to Mom. Grandpa Shulyakovsky told him, ‘Never become a teacher.’ Grandpa had experienced this work; he worked as a teacher all his life.

We had a seven-year education system at that time and there were evening courses, for those who wanted to complete nine-year education. Yefim finished such evening educational courses and left for the district center to work as a teacher. Later he became the Head of the Rayono [District Educational Department]. Then he moved to Minsk [today capital of Belarus], graduated from university and worked at school as a teacher and a headmaster simultaneously. Later he took a post-graduate course in Leningrad. He worked at the post-graduate department of the Device Construction Institute and taught history. After he graduated from the post-graduate department, he was assigned to Sverdlovsk [today Yekaterinburg] 7. He married Yefrosinia Ivanovna [Frosya], a Russian woman. She graduated from the Pedagogical Institute. They didn’t observe Jewish traditions in their family.

When the war broke out, Yefim worked at Sverdlovsk University. He wrote me a letter, ‘I am leaving for the frontline as a volunteer.’ As head of the Sub-faculty [of History], he had the right not to go to the frontline, but he volunteered. Later he wrote, ‘Mom and Nina must have perished, so you should better come and live with Frosya.’ When Mom found me we left for Sverdlovsk together. He was on training near Sverdlovsk. Mom talked to him on the phone and told him, ‘Kill these Fascists without sparing yourself.’ Yefim started as a common secret service man, but he had a very good command of both Polish and German. He finished the war as head of the Division Reconnaissance Department in the rank of colonel. He took part in action and was slightly wounded. He wrote to us that his colleague was at the hospital in Sverdlovsk, they had been together, but that guy was wounded, so we should visit him. Later Yefim was assigned to Voronezh. He died there at the age of 77, in 1984. His two sons and their wives came to my 90th birthday celebration [in 2002].

My other elder brother Lev, born in 1908, was a hydrologist-oceanologist. He graduated from the Agricultural Institute, the Melioration Faculty, became a doctor of sciences 8 and a professor. He worked at the Hydrometcenter [in Moscow] during the war, provided the army with information about the freezing of rivers and oceans. He wasn’t at the frontline. He wasn’t married. He didn’t observe any Jewish traditions. He died in 1976.

My elder sister Nina was born in 1910. She was a candidate of medical sciences, taught pathological anatomy first at the Minsk Institute, later in evacuation in Sverdlovsk. In 1943 she wrote to Moscow, her professor invited her there, thus since 1943 she was in Moscow 9. They had a four-year study period at the Medical Institute at that time. She entered it even a little bit earlier than it was allowed, because there were no passports [i.e. nobody knew her age]. She defended her thesis in Moscow already at the age of 24 and studied for three years at the post-graduate department. Her family didn’t observe Jewish traditions either. Nina died at the age of 70 in 1980.

She had a daughter, Nelya [Nelly], who came to visit me on my 90th birthday celebration. Nelya is 67 years old now. She graduated from the Geology Faculty of the Moscow University. She also worked at the Moscow University. She is retired now. Six people came to visit me on that date without invitation: my nieces and nephews. My sister’s husband was subject to repression because he was a Pole 10. We cut his face out of the family picture, such was the time. I remember when I was a student, a female student was taken away by a ‘black raven’ and we all destroyed her

pictures. [Editor's note: The 'black ravens' were black colored vans, which took people away to the NKVD 11 – and most of them never came back home after that.]

Growing up

I was born in Slutsk in 1912. At the time, my parents were renting a house on Shkolnaya Street in Slutsk. In 1915 Dad left for World War I. When Dad was at the frontline, Mom worked somewhere. I was three years old at that time. He was a common soldier. I have a picture which Mom sent to Dad during World War I. Dad made a note on the picture: 'In memory of World War I. Received on 18th June 1916.' He came back from the war in 1918. I remember how I got scared. He entered from the back entrance. I stood there and suddenly a man with a beard walked in.

I don't remember the Revolution, but I remember how some celebration was organized in the square: first the Tsar [Nokolai II] was 'overthrown' and then he was 'murdered.' I recall just separate episodes and overheard conversations, though I didn't understand anything. I remember the occupation, first Polish and then German. The Germans were very good, not like the Poles. The Poles had a very bad attitude to Communists and Jews, and could treat you to a whip. Two of my cousins were Communists and they were searched for. It was a very uneasy time.

I remember how during the Civil War 12 the Reds 13 were on one side of the street, and the Whites 14 were on the opposite side. We peeped through a crack and saw the Whites on the opposite side. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. My brother said, 'We have to check, maybe it's the Reds.' We opened the door, looked into the observation window and saw that it was our lot, one of the Reds. He came to ask for something, we gave him some bread, as much as we had. The second episode, which I remember: there was nothing to eat and then we found some potatoes. As soon as we boiled them and sat at the table, our neighbor came in and said, 'Why are you sitting here, the Poles are retreating, they are cutting all the cables and setting everything on fire, we have to leave.' So we left the food, Mother took a bundle and we went into the field behind the houses and waited there until they [the Poles] retreated. We could hear the screams in the city.

I went to the first grade of school. Then we had no money to pay for my studies, and my brothers and sister continued to teach me. They taught me everything according to the school program, preparing me for school. We had nothing to pay with and nothing to wear. The school had to be paid and pupils brought logs for the fire to school. My sister wasn't allowed to go to school either, as we had no money and nothing to wear, but she was stubborn and went anyway. She put on Mom's thick plush jacket, Mom's shoes and went to the first grade. Thus she 'fought her way through.'

Then, approximately in 1927, I passed exams for the fifth grade and went to school. I could write essays on one and the same subject both on my own behalf and on behalf of my friend who couldn't write any. My cousin told me that when he wrote a composition [an essay] in Belarusian, he got 'very bad' marks. When I wrote them for him he got 'very good' marks. I went to the seven-year school starting from the fifth grade, there were seven-year schools at that time. When the eighth grade was introduced, I wrote a composition. The teacher who taught at my brothers' gymnasium returned the composition to me and told me, 'Your brothers also wrote good ones.' [Raisa wrote for all of them, that's why the teacher praised them].

There was no difference between children at school – whether they were Jews or not. Such difference was introduced later by Stalin. There was no anti-Semitism. Later my daughter told me that they asked about your nationality at school. I had a friend from among old Petersburg intellectuals, whose last name was Chastovich. She told me, ‘When I went to school, no one asked about your nationality, we only knew who attended the God’s Law classes [religion].’ Only Russians attend the God’s Law classes. We certainly didn’t have this subject as we studied in the Soviet time 15.

I finished eight grades in Slutsk, there was no ninth grade. I passed the ninth grade exams without attending lectures in a small district town. When my elder brother left to work as a teacher, my second brother, my sister and myself rented a room, while he worked and paid for our room. Then our second brother left and my sister and I remained. In summer we lived in the village and came to the town for studies. When my sister left, I remained alone and in 1931 I left for Leningrad to enter university. There were no exams to enter university, if one had a certificate of nine grades of school and an appropriate social status [i.e. working class]. I wanted to enter the Chemical Technological Institute, but they didn’t provide a dormitory and I applied for an institute with a dormitory. Thus I entered the Textile Institute.

I remember how the coercive collectivization 16 was carried out. We, the Komsomol 17 members from our town, were ordered to carry out propaganda for kolkhozes. In 1932 town citizens were issued [internal] passports and the village citizens didn’t get any, so that they wouldn’t escape from kolkhozes.

Our parents didn’t tell me, my sister or my brothers much about Jewish culture. They didn’t really observe the traditions, only for appearance’s sake. Mom cooked gefilte fish, tsimes and matzah. There were separate utensils for meat and dairy products; also separate Pesach utensils. We celebrated the holidays though, especially Pesach. There was matzah and no bread products. The Pesach seder was held. It was all very solemn and beautiful. Everything was tidied up and it was a very festive occasion. We weren’t taught to pray, at least my sister and I weren’t. My parents went to the synagogue and I also went there several times. All Jewish holidays were celebrated in our family until my elder brother joined the Komsomol. He turned everything upside down with that. From then on Jewish holidays and ceremonies were not celebrated in our family.

We lived poorly, Dad couldn’t provide for our family properly. Mother sewed very well and when Dad was at the front line, people said, ‘Doesn’t she think about her husband, who is in the war, look what clothes she wears and how she dresses her kids!’ White scarves were very fashionable: she made them from gauze and trimmed them with old lace. She sewed pleated dresses from gauze bandages. I wore such a dress in summer when it was warm, when I was in the first grade. She could make other clothes as well.

After the war they rented an apartment in Slutsk. Dad worked as an accountant and Mother was a housewife. Dad had friends of various nationalities in Slutsk. He had two friends, who worked as teachers. My parents read all sorts of books; we had a cultural, literate and intellectual home. We read Dostoevsky 18, Gorky 19 and a lot of classics. Dad read to my brothers and recommended them what to read. I was small at that time. Maybe we had literature in German, because Dad knew German.

Our parents didn't subscribe to newspapers, but sometimes they bought them, Dad read them. Our parents spoke Yiddish to each other, but with us they spoke both Yiddish and Russian. Our parents had very good relations with each other, they were very close. Dad was a quiet person, not practical. Mom did all the work, both men's and women's. Mom could sometimes shout at the kids, but Father never did that. He spent evenings with his children. Mom and Dad never went anywhere for a holiday, because we lived poorly. The apartment which I remember had several rooms; Mom even let one room out to some cadets. She cooked for them too. Then the landlord came and threw himself on my mother with a knife, because we weren't paying for the apartment.

So we had to move to Grandpa Shulyakovsky's place. Later on Grandpa also asked us to leave because my mother didn't observe all traditions on Friday. On Friday the stove had to be heated, and the stove door had to be pasted over with rags and not touched until Saturday. It was a Jewish tradition, which meant that nothing could be done after that. One had to clean everything in advance, everything had to be shiny and no work could be done on Sabbath. Mother didn't observe this rule. Grandpa lived alone in his own house and his daughter lived in the neighboring house. He had three rooms and a kitchen in his house. I was around six or seven years old at that time. There was ordinary furniture in the house: a table, a cupboard, a wardrobe. There was nothing on the walls.

In 1925 we left for our second grandfather's – not the religious one, but the Soviet one –in the kolkhoz, in the village of Podliptsy in Slutsk district. We left for this kolkhoz during the NEP 20 times, when one had to know how to live, so 'non-shifty' people joined the kolkhozes. We lived in a landowner's house, which was like a dormitory and we got a room there. There was no synagogue in the village.

Mom and Dad lived in the kolkhoz approximately between 1925 and 1932, but we, the children, only lived with our parent until leaving to study. Later they moved back to Slutsk and rented a small house there. Dad worked at the MTS [machine-tractor station] in Slutsk as an accountant.

Between 1932 and 1941 my parents lived on their own in Slutsk. In 1941 World War II began. At that time my mother, my sister Nina and her daughter were in Poland in a resort called Druskininkai [today Lithuania]. My sister had been there before and she wanted my Mom to get some treatment there.

They stayed in Druskininkai for seven days and on the eighth day the war broke out. People staying at the resort, said, 'It's not possible to sleep because of the training maneuvers starting at four in the morning!' But it wasn't maneuvers. At noon it was announced that the war had started. They were provided with a train. When the 'Air!' command sounded [bombing started], they were supposed to leave the train and lie down on the ground. Then the retreat was beat, they got back on the train and continued the trip.

When they reached Minsk, the train was bombed. My sister lived in Minsk at that time. They were not able to get into her apartment; they left their suitcases and joined the retreating army on foot. Sometimes they were given a lift by passing cars. Later on the three of them were pushed into a train. They didn't know where they were going. The train came to Leningrad. I had a neighbor at that time 21 and we were taught not to open the door: 'Don't open the door to anyone, there are a lot of spies.' The door bell rang at night. My neighbor asked me not to open, but I heard Mom's voice. Thus Mom found me in Leningrad and stayed with me. We were evacuated from Leningrad in

September 1941. My brother Yefim wrote to me from Sverdlovsk and asked me to join his wife Frosya, so I left together with Mom for Sverdlovsk.

My Dad remained in Slutsk. My sister's friends, physicians, who were delivered to guerillas by plane, talked to our friends. One woman saw Father sweep the streets in the ghetto. In 1943 a German officer was killed and after that the ghetto was burnt down. Dad perished there. The ghetto was set up in Slutsk. I found out about it in the course of the war,. Later on after the war my brother organized a trip to Slutsk and went there together with our sister. In the middle of the square there stood a small obelisk in memory of those who were burnt alive in the ghetto. My brother was very much upset, when he saw goats grazing right near it, there was no order and the obelisk was small.

As a first-year student I was a 'komsorg' [Komsomol organizer] and my husband-to-be was a 'partorg' [Communist Party organizer]. Later he was accepted to Frunze College according to the party enlistment. It was possible to enter a military-navy college at that time based on party or Komsomol enlistment. So he was accepted there after his first year of studies. My husband's name was Fyodor Petrovich Shevyolkin, a Russian, who came from a village, a common fellow from Vologda region, born in 1907. My husband was a naval officer, he was a commander. I was a technologist-engineer by profession.

We got married in 1935, when I was a fifth-year student. We had a common wedding in Krasny ugolok, danced a little bit and that was all. [Krasnyred is derived from the old-Russian word 'krasivy' [beautiful], thus Krasny ugolok means the most beautiful place in the house. This phrase acquired an ideological meaning during the Soviet time. Krasny ugolok in the house could be a separate room, or a separate place in the room, decorated with red flags, stands dedicated to the Revolution heroes, production pace-makers etc. Party meetings and other ceremonies mostly took place in Krasny ugolok.] There were no guests, only our closest friends. We weren't registered [i.e. there was no formal wedding], every open marriage [cohabitation] was considered legal. He submitted documents to the college, or rather wrote in the papers that he had such-and-such wife and they believed him. We didn't need to register at that time. If a man left for the war, he wrote that he had a wife and everybody believed him, people were honest.

After we got married, we got a room in the dormitory. He lived at the college, I lived in the dormitory but we got a room on Krasnaya Street, in the Textile Institute dormitory. After the institute I could do without an assignment, as I was a wife of a military man. But we had our ideological principles and I agreed to be assigned. I was assigned to Chernigov, to the Kotoninnaya factory. The factory produced short spinning fiber, a chemical one, it's not produced anymore. I worked less than a year and left for Vladivostok where my husband was assigned to. I found a job as head of laboratory at a plywood plant. A very stupid profession, but I had university education, so I could work. I was accountable to the Leningrad Laboratory.

During the war

My daughter Alvina was born in Vladivostok in 1937. I left Vladivostok when Alvina was six months old. I 'wanted to go to Europe,' as it was called there, and left for Minsk. That was in 1938 and in 1939 I came back to Leningrad. I stayed at home with my child and lived at first with my sister and later with my Mom. After some time my husband came back. He worked near Leningrad and I lived in Peterhof [suburb of Leningrad]. Later we moved to Leningrad. The building where I live now was

constructed in 1940. We got a room there. At the time my husband worked on a ship under construction. He stayed on this ship in the course of the war. In 1941 the war broke out. Everybody waited for the action to begin. Some sailors came in the morning; they were called ‘krasnoflotsy,’ and called for him. He said, ‘This must be some training in case of war, I’ll be back soon.’ But he went directly to the front, he served near Leningrad. He came back in 1944.

But during the war, in 1944 it was all mixed up, whether a man was married or not, and there appeared a notion of PPZH [acronym for camp-field wife]. Then a law was issued stating that only a registered marriage was considered legal. After the war I went to the district ZAGS [department of registration of acts of civil condition] together with my husband and our daughter. My daughter was our witness, she was seven years old, and we got registered, but I didn’t change my last name. None of my friends or relatives changed their names. Some, who wanted, changed names after the registration. When my husband was at war, I got money based on a certificate, only because I said that I was his wife. He was a career officer and I got some money.

I didn’t feel anti-Semitism before the war. It began, I think, in the course of the war and continued after the war. It came from Stalin. We had a neighbor family. The woman fell sick, something was wrong with her mentally, she was a student of the Architecture Faculty at the Construction Institute. She just passed an exam in Marxism-Leninism. They called a psychiatrist for her and it was necessary to take her to hospital. She wanted me to accompany her. So I did. In the car she told me, ‘Stalin and Hitler are the same, they are of one kind.’ She was Russian and she was a very clever woman, she could draw very well.

When in 1941 the war broke out I decided that I shouldn’t have another baby, my daughter was small, she was three years old. Abortions were prohibited. So I had to find a person secretly who helped to force a miscarriage and then I went to the hospital. It wasn’t possible to confess at the hospital that it had been done on purpose; I had to say that it had happened accidentally, as one could have been jailed for that. The person who performed that would have been imprisoned, but not me. I didn’t even know her, someone recommended her to me, she came, did her job, and left.

I was in Sverdlovsk during the war. We left Leningrad in August and the blockade began in September 22, but when I was still here, everything was relatively quiet. When I was going to Sverdlovsk, my mother told me that she didn’t need anything, only not to see the war. She told me, ‘Imagine, a young soldier is lying and begging: ‘Please, finish me off, I cannot suffer anymore.’ And we can’t do anything.’ So she said, ‘The main thing is not to see the war, let’s leave, we don’t even have to take anything with us, we just have to go.’

In Sverdlovsk, when my daughter was four years old, she was told that she shouldn’t have gone to the dormitory, because Jews lived there, who were bad people. But I told her that I was a Jewess also and she said, ‘That’s not true, you are different,’ and then she understood that we were all different and everything depended on the person.

We returned to Leningrad in 1944 when the blockade was completely lifted. I worked at the Geophysical Observatory as a senior technician. Then Alvina went to school. I told her, ‘When you get your passport, write anything you want to be’ [indicate any nationality]. Stalin decided to ask schoolchildren about their nationality when they came to study. She came home happy and said, ‘We will get passports soon, I think.’ She was in the first grade then. I asked why. She replied, ‘We were asked about our nationality.’ I asked her, ‘What did you say?’ She replied, ‘Russian.’ One of

the girls replied that she was a Jewess and blushed. This was how anti-Semitism was propagated.

The Main Geophysical Observatory where I worked was far away from home. People didn't get fired at that time, so I had to lie, and my husband sent a reference note stating that I had to move to Tallinn [today capital of Estonia] where he served at that time. Since he was a military man, I was released. Then I got transferred to VNIIM [All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Meteorology], it was across the street from the Technological Institute and closer to our home. It was my last place of work, until I was fired. All Jews were fired from that place later on 23. After that I didn't work, Mom told me that I shouldn't work while she was alive. It was in 1950. There was a Russian Party secretary at my work place, who decided to get rid of all Jews in our organization and only one Jewess remained.

After the war

After Stalin's death in 1953 nothing changed in my life. When the 'Doctors' Plot' 24 occurred, we understood that it was a provocation. Matusovsky [a Soviet poet] wrote, 'We trusted you so much, Comrade Stalin, as we may not have trusted ourselves.' Almost everyone cried when he died. When Khrushchev 26 exposed him 27, I thought about what my neighbor told me, when I saw her off to the hospital, 'Stalin and Hitler are the same.'

My daughter Alvina didn't get married for a long time, until she was 27 years old, she turned everybody down, and finally she married a fellow from Vologda, similar to my husband. Her neighbor invited her to a party at the institute, where a guy approached her and saw her off home. He asked her to give him her phone number. She gave him the number and confused him with the entrances to the building, lied to him. Later she went to another student party, and a soldier ran up to her, just like in a movie, and said, 'I was running around the block, looking for you, but couldn't find you, and I couldn't reach you on the phone.' And she liked him in the soldier's uniform. And his student friend put on his uniform, not a soldier's one, but a suit, and she didn't like him in that suit. But then she began to like him and she started going out with him, I mean, with this friend of that guy, whom she lied to about the entrances to the house.

Before she invited him home, I told her, 'You wanted to find someone who is your intellectual equal.' And she replied, 'Well, he absorbs everything like a sponge, I will educate him.' She bought him books on rhetoric, which taught him how to talk. He spoke about me at my 90th birthday celebration, about how I taught him a lot. A very nice man. He spoke very kindly about me, normally they don't say such nice things about mothers-in-law.

Alvina graduated from the Medical Institute [in Leningrad] and worked on the artificial kidney project. She was very talented and spoke English fluently. She died in 1985. My daughter had a bad heart. She got sick in the third grade. The doctor stated a diagnosis and my mother, who was experienced with her kids, told him, 'She's got diphtheria.' The doctor said, 'She was vaccinated.' 'Still she's got diphtheria, you've got to take a smear.' They did take a smear and it appeared that she had advanced diphtheria, which later developed complications for her heart. When she fell ill, she felt very bad, and the ambulance didn't come for a long time. When they came, it wasn't possible to save her. Later they explained to me that some connection failed to function and they didn't hear our calls.

Alvina didn't speak Yiddish. When we were in evacuation, I spoke Yiddish with Mom, but Alvina learnt just several words. She mixed Russian and non-Russian words: 'Wo ist der kettle?' I told both her and my granddaughter about Jewish traditions. But my granddaughter Tatiana turned to the Russian Orthodox religion. My husband was very upset that she plunged into Orthodoxy, icons were hanging everywhere, but he wasn't against it. Everyone may live as they want. When someone said anything against the Jews, my husband asked, 'Do you believe in Jesus?' He said this because Jesus and all twelve apostles were Jews.

Sometimes I told my husband, 'If you didn't know me and my family, you would be as anti-Semitic as everyone around.' But he never agreed with me on this. My granddaughter Tanya [Tatiana] worked at a pedagogical college after finishing school. One of the teachers was a ferocious anti-Semite, and my granddaughter defended the Jews. So that woman saidm 'You and your mother must be Jews.' But Tanya replied, 'My mother and I are Russian' and continued to defend Jews. My daughter Alvina said, 'Must be the genes.' And I said, 'Not the genes but the upbringing.' She saw her Russian father, his relatives, and our relatives and judged about each person according to their virtues and her upbringing. My granddaughter Tanya has two children.

One of my relatives left for America and died there. We were of the same age. She wrote to me that her only consolation was the Russian radio. I know nothing about Jewish traditions in her family. I never ever had thoughts about leaving, either for Israel or for America. Russia is my motherland.

I get lunches from the Jewish community and papers every Monday. I'm not shy to say that I am a Jewess. I keep up with events in Israel. I constantly get literature from Hesed though my sight is bad and I'd better not read. However I can't say anything, I'm not a politician.

Unfortunately, I have no relatives and no friends anymore, they all departed for the better world. My husband died in 1997. I keep contact only with my granddaughter and a woman who is my neighbor.

Glossary:

1 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 former Soviet Union 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.

2 Item 5

This was the ethnicity/nationality factor, which was included on all official documents and job application forms. Thus, the Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were more easily discriminated against from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

3 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.

4 Jewish collective farms

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

5 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.

6 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.

7 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

8 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research,

the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

9 Residence permit

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

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 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

12 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.

13 Reds

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

14 Whites (White Army)
Counter-revolutionary armed forces that fought against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. The White forces were very heterogeneous: They included monarchists and liberals - supporters of the Constituent Assembly and the tsar. Nationalist and anti-Semitic attitude was very common among rank-and-file members of the white movement, and expressed in both their propaganda material and in the organization of pogroms against Jews. White Army slogans were patriotic. The Whites were united by hatred towards the Bolsheviks and the desire to restore a 'one and inseparable' Russia. The main forces of the White Army were defeated by the Red Army at the end of 1920.

15 Struggle against religion
The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

16 Collectivization in the USSR
In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

17 Komsomol
Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

18 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)
Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

19 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)
Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

20 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

21 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning ‘excess’ living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

22 Blockade of Leningrad

On 8th September 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until 27th January 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

23 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’.

24 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.

25 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.

26 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.