

# Hana Muchnik

Hana Muchnik

Kishinev

Moldova

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: July 2004

*Hana Muchnik lives in a small two-bedroom apartment in an apartment building built in the 1970s in Kishinev (Chisinau in Moldovan). The apartment is modestly furnished and one can tell that the family is rather poor. Hana is a very nice lady with gray, neatly done hair and a sweet smile. Hana is very ill: her legs fail her, and it was a problem for her even to come to the door to open it for me. Every move causes her pain, but she is very friendly and hospitable. Hana tells me she's been thinking of keeping the memory of her ancestors and their life in their little town. She happily agreed to give this interview.*

[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

## My family background

I come from the small town of Orhei located on the picturesque bank of the Raut River in Bessarabia [1](#), about 60 kilometers from Kishinev. The long street, I would even call it Jewish, leading from the river was populated by Jews. There were a number of stores and shops owned by Jews on it. Tailor Facer had clients as far as Kishinev, Nisemboin owned a confectionary, medications and hygienic means were sold by Fischelev, the banquet hall was owned by Breutman. Then there were Shistik, Volovskiye, Golbinskiye: they were our neighbors. The majority of houses in Orhei were one-storied buildings: only Fischelev, a wealthy man, built two two-storied houses: one for himself and one for his son. My grandfather and our family lived in a long one-storied building with two front doors: one for my grandfather's and one for our family.

My paternal grandfather, Joiseph Muchnik, born in Orhei in the 1850s, was rather wealthy. He owned a big leather/shoe store: it sold shoes and leather, glue and components for shoemaking. His clients were shoemakers of Orhei and they often visited my grandfather at home. My grandfather and my father treated them with scorn: the shoemakers' guild was at the very bottom of the town's hierarchy. My paternal grandmother died long before I was born. I can't even remember her name. My grandfather remarried. His second wife Udl boasted of her distant relation to the very Baal-Shem-Tov [2](#). She was 20 years younger than my grandfather and agreed to marry him for his wealth. They didn't have children together. She and Joiseph were very religious. They were real Hasidim [3](#). When my grandfather grew old and blind, and could work in his store no

longer, Udl left him and moved to America, where her daughters lived. My grandfather lived to the end of his life in solitude, getting warm by our hearth. He died in 1935.

My father, the oldest of the children, was born in the 1880s. His sister Leya, whom I never knew, came next. Leya married Rozhkovskiy, a Jewish man from Ukraine. They had a son and lived on the Soviet side of the Dniestr after the Revolution of 1917 [4](#). Therefore, during the Romanian rule [5](#), before Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR [6](#) we didn't even mention to anyone that we had relatives in the USSR. Leya and her husband died before the Great Patriotic War [7](#). I met their son, Moisey Rozhkovskiy, after the Great Patriotic War. He was a veteran of combat actions and lived in Kishinev before he moved to the USA in the mid-1980s. This is all the information I have about him.

Indl – she was called Inna at home – my grandfather's next daughter, was a beauty. I heard that when she was young and walked along the streets in Kishinev or Odessa [8](#), men turned their heads after her. She married Iosif Pagis, a lawyer, who was a public rabbi in Orhei. He kept Jewish birth and death records and was a well-respected, and even honored, citizen of the town. Iosif was a Zionist [9](#), and when the Soviet rule was established in Bessarabia in 1940, he was exiled to the Gulag [10](#) with Indl and their younger daughter Esphir. Iosif was taken to a camp in Tuman [Sverdlovsk, today Russia] where he died. Indl didn't live much longer than him. She also died in the north. Esphir got married after the war and returned to Kishinev. About 20 years ago she moved to the USA with her family. Now they live in San Francisco.

The life of the older daughter was tragic. Surah was as beautiful as her mother. Shortly before the war she got married for great love. At the very start of the war her husband was mobilized to the army, and Surah and her husband's sister, who was in the late stages of her pregnancy, walked out of Orhei. On their way they bumped into Constantinescu, a Romanian officer, whom Surah used to know in the past: he had made advances to her then, but she'd rejected him. He decided to take his revenge. He brutally raped Surah and her pregnant sister-in-law and killed them. Indl's son Nathan Pagis was an officer during the Great Patriotic War. He got a medical education, graduated from Kishinev Medical University and became a neuropathologist. Now he lives in Canada with his family.

My father's next sister Sluvah married Froim Pagis, a Jewish man. He wasn't Iosif's relative. Sluvah had two children. Her older daughter was lost during evacuation. Sluvah never found her. Sluvah's son was traumatized by bombings, fear and horror. After the war the three of them returned to Kishinev. Sluvah died in the mid-1970s. I have no information about her son.

My father's younger brother Leibl, born in the 1890s, also owned a store. His first wife died and he had to raise their son Haim. His second wife Rosa was quarrelsome and irritable. She didn't accept the boy and he had to live with other people. Rosa and Leibl had two sons: Yakov and Shura. He was a failure both in his family and in his work life and all he thought was left for him was to put an end to his life. Leibl was found hanging in the shed by his house. This happened in the late 1930s. Rosa, who was much affected by this, didn't even live two years after his death.

Haim, the older son, didn't get any support from his relatives and moved to Palestine. My mother didn't accept him, and he didn't forgive her for the rest of his life. He fought in the war against the Fascists in the English army. Yakov, who was 15 years old, and Shura, 13 years old, evacuated in 1941. Yakov was an epileptic. He had another seizure, fell into a ditch in Central Asia and suffocated. Shura, the younger one, returned to Orhei and visited us occasionally. My sister gave

him food and some money. Shura became a jeweler, got married and had two daughters. He wasn't happy in his family life and began having problems when jewelers who were working with gold illegally started to get prosecuted. Shura resolved the situation in a very simple way: he hanged himself like his father did.

My father's younger sister Hona, born in the early 1900s, also married a Jewish man. Her family name was Tarover. Hona's son perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. She and her husband returned from the evacuation and settled in his house. She and her husband died from typhus during an epidemic shortly after they returned.

My father, Duvid Muchnik, the oldest in the family, was born in the early 1880s. I don't know whether my father had any education besides cheder. All I know is that he was a rather literate man. He could read and write Yiddish and Romanian. He must have also known Russian. He loved Pushkin [11](#), but we didn't speak Russian in our family before the Soviet rule was established. My father, being the oldest son, was helping my grandfather Joiseph in the store before the Soviet rule was established. My father was raised in a religious Hasidic family, but he never became a Hasid. My father was very religious, but he observed religious beliefs other than Hasidic ones. It's hard to say to what religious trend my father belonged to. All I remember is that he often argued with my grandfather about religious issues. My parents' marriage was prearranged, as was quite common in Jewish families.

My mother's family came from the small village of Chichelnitsa, not far from Orhei. Her parents died long before I was born. I think my grandmother had died before my parents' wedding since my mother named her first daughter after her. [One of the most common Jewish practices is to name a child to honor a relative. Sephardi Jews name their children freely after both living and deceased relatives. However, Ashkenazim rarely name children after living relatives.] My grandfather died a few years later. I heard that my grandfather Anchel Sorotskiy, born in the 1860s, was rather wealthy. He owned land and fields. He hired workforce to work in these fields. He also kept cows and sheep. Mama told me that her family lived in a big two-storied mansion. There was beautiful expensive furniture, musical instruments and toys at her home. Even her and her sister's dolls, as tall as the girls, were purchased in England. Grandmother was a real lady and supervised housemaids and governesses helping her about the house. From what I heard, Grandfather Anchel had a hard and quarrelsome character. Neither his family nor his employees liked him. The villagers working for him burned down his mansion and cattle farms during some upheaval, and my grandfather actually went bankrupt. He and Grandmother Elka died very poor because my grandfather's bankruptcy dramatically affected their lives.

My mother's older brother, Gershl Sorotskiy, got married, when my grandfather was still wealthy. His father supported his family and he actually didn't learn any vocation. Later he was a farmer, but had no employees working for him and could hardly make ends meet. He and his wife Sosia had eleven children. Two of them died in infancy. Gershl and his family were miserably poor and would have starved had it not been for my mother's support. Only Gershl's older son Simon got a higher education. He lived with us in Orhei, finished a gymnasium [lyceum], studied and graduated from Kishinev University and worked as a lawyer. I have hardly any information about his other children. Gershl died before the Great Patriotic War. His wife Sosia and five daughters were in evacuation and after the war they returned to Chichelnitsa. Sosia died at the age of 95. After she died her five daughters moved to Israel. They are rather wealthy now.

Mama's younger sister Beila, who got married while she was still a girl from a wealthy family, didn't live with her husband long. When my grandfather went bankrupt and died, Beila's husband left her and took her son Anchel and daughter Elka with him. I have no information about them. As for Beila, she moved in with us and actually became my second mother. My mother's youngest brother David died young. This is all I know about him.

My mother, Golda Sorotskaya, was born in 1886. I think she must have studied with a visiting teacher [melamed] at home: this was quite common with wealthier families. She could write and read Yiddish like my father. My parents didn't tell me about their wedding, but I think it was a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and lots of guests. After the wedding my parents lived in my grandfather Joiseph's house. In 1908 Mama gave birth to a girl. She named her Elka. My older brother Haim was born in 1910, and in 1915 my second brother, named Anchel after my deceased grandfather, came into this world. My mother had no other children for a long time before I was born on 18th September 1923.

## Growing up

Though I was the youngest of the children and one would have thought I was to be everybody's favorite, I felt like nobody needed me at all. My sister and brothers, who were much older than me, ignored me and didn't want to play with me. My parents didn't take any account of me and could, in my presence, discuss subjects that were not appropriate for a child to hear. So I heard my mother telling a neighbor that I was an unexpected child and a 'burden,' and I think this affected my whole life. However, I can't say that I was mistreated. I had everything I needed and even more, but I lacked warmth and love that each child needs so much. Aunt Beila, who was living with us, was my favorite. I followed her and demanded that she played with me and she never refused me: she played with dolls and stones, read me fairy tales and told me stories. I guess this also helped her to suppress her longing for her own children.

We lived in one half of my grandfather's house. There were four big row rooms: a living room, a bedroom, another room, where Aunt Beila and the older children lived, a kitchen and a cellar in our part of the house. There was a store, two big rooms and a kitchen in my grandfather's part of the house. There was a warehouse and sheds, where food products for holidays were stored in the big long backyard of the house. I remember Uncle Gershl riding his wagon into the yard to have sacks full of flour and cereals, jars of jam and jarred fat loaded on it to haul these food stocks back to his home in Chichelnitsa, where his numerous family were waiting for him. Gershl arrived quite often. My father thought we had too much for our family and just ignored these visits of his. Our family was rather wealthy: I guess the store brought good profits. However, there were no luxuries at our home. Mama did all housework herself and only Aunt Beila helped her about the house. Marusia, a Moldovan girl, came in to do the laundry. Marusia could often be late – she had a drinking habit – and I remember how nervous my mother was when she didn't show up on time. When she did come in, everything got going: there were big boiling tubs with the laundry, the smell of soap and then the washing was hanged on a long line in the yard.

Mama was an excellent housewife. She cooked delicious food and baked white bread. When my brother and I were fed up with white bread she gave us money to buy brown bread. Jewish traditions were observed in the house, particularly, the kosher rules. The meat and dairy products were kept separately: there were separate utensils, preparation boards and knives for these

products. On Friday Mama started the preparations for the celebration of Sabbath. Beila usually did a general clean up and Mama did the cooking. She left the food in the oven to keep it hot. Our neighbors Volovskiye, older people, sent their housemaid to bring their food to keep it till the next day in our oven and pick it up on Saturday [Shabbath]. On Saturday we weren't allowed to do any work. We had Alexei, a Moldovan old man, come in to stoke the stove, light a candle and take the dinner out of the oven. My father was back from the synagogue by that time, and the family sat down to dinner. My father was very religious. He had a cap on working in his store and wore a kippah, tallit and tefillin on his hand and forehead. My father prayed every day at the nearby synagogue. This synagogue was called the 'market' synagogue in Orhei [the construction of this synagogue was funded by merchants and tradesmen]. On Saturday and on holidays my father went to the big, beautiful synagogue where my parents had seats they had paid for.

The children in our family were raised in accordance with Jewish traditions. I was sent to a private Jewish kindergarten, though it existed for no longer than about six months. I was taught the Yiddish alphabet at home. When we had guests, I was put on a chair in front of them to demonstrate my knowledge of the alphabet. My grandfather Joiseph spent a lot of time with me: he taught me Hebrew, told me about the Jewish religion and about Hasidim. I felt that my grandfather needed me in his life and I appreciated it a lot, lacking my parents' love. Udl had left my grandfather: he was old and he could hardly see and I accompanied him to the synagogue, carrying his prayer book. I went for walks with my grandfather and he gratefully kissed me, wishing me well. I enjoyed the holidays in my grandfather's house to the utmost. He was well-respected in the town, and I remember the celebration of the Simchat Torah [last day of Sukkot], when older Jews got together in his house to pray, sat at the table having a meal, sang and danced with the Torah – I liked it so much!

My uncle, the public rabbi, was the only rabbi in Orhei [there was a title of spiritual rabbi (kohein) and public rabbi. The spiritual rabbi performed at the synagogue and the public one represented interests of Jews to the state authorities]. When the rabbi visited the town on holidays, he stayed in my grandfather's house. On these days I felt significant. Firstly, I never left my grandfather's side on these days and I looked at the visitor with admiration: I believed he was close to God. Religious Jews came to the house to visit the rabbi, waiting for their turn in the fore room and the yard. The shomes invited visitors to the rabbi. Then the rabbi and my grandfather had lunch and I joined them.

There was always plenty of food. According to the Jewish customs, the leftovers are sacred and are given to people. The visitors asked me to say a word for them to my uncle about giving them some leftovers and I was very happy to be of help. This was done every year before 1934, when my grandfather was bedridden due to severe illness. He died in 1935. The rabbi, whom my grandfather had received in his home, came to the funeral. The rabbi recited the mourning prayer for my grandfather. I went to my grandfather's funeral and took part in the mourning, though according to the Jewish rules the children whose parents were living weren't supposed to attend funerals or go to the cemetery, but my parents didn't mind my going to the cemetery. [The halakhah only says that a person is permitted to recite the Kaddish for other close relatives as well as parents, but only if his/her parents are dead. Probably in Hana's community there were different traditions.]

Our family also observed all traditions and celebrated holidays. My favorite holiday was Pesach. Purim was celebrated one month before the Pesach. This was a merry holiday. Mama baked

hamantashen and made fluden, cookies with honey and nuts, and we brought shelakhmones [mishlo'ah manot, sending of gifts to one another], a tray with cookies, strudel, sweets and apples to our neighbors. There was a carnival procession in the streets, stopping by each house. The owners, including my father, dropped their contributions into a special box of contributions for Palestine. I enjoyed the feeling of expectation of Pesach. The preparation started immediately after Purim. Everything was cleaned and fixed, painted and repaired. [The Passover cleaning, the mitzvah of biur chametz – getting rid of chametz – and other traditions described below belong to Pesach traditions according to the halakhah.]

Elka and Haim, the older children, left the house and lived their own lives. Anchel was a little older than me and didn't enjoy the holidays as much as I did. Our parents bought us gifts. I got new patent leather shoes made by a client of my father's. I don't know where my old ones disappeared each time, though I only wore them once. Mama must have sent them to Gershl's daughters. I also wore a new dress: a lovely velvet or lace dress.

The first sign of the holiday was a box of matzah. The box was locked and it wasn't allowed to start eating the matzah before the holiday. On the eve of the holiday the special crockery was taken down from the attic. I loved this crockery! The silver spoons and forks were shining, but were cleaned again nevertheless. I had two little cups: the blue and the white ones. The table was covered with a new starched table cloth. In the evening the seder began. At ten o'clock in the morning we had breakfast with the last slice of bread: there was to be no bread in the following days. My father cut a piece of bread into ten little pieces and placed them around the house. His next step was to sweep it onto a plate with a goose feather. I followed him, watching that he didn't miss a crumb and indicating it if he did. However, he never missed a piece.

Mama and Aunt Beila were busy in the kitchen cooking and stewing, paying no attention to me. I remember getting hungry, nagging Aunt Beila: 'The child is hungry!' Mama hastened to fry a goose liver offering it to me, but with no bread. An hour later I get hungry again: Mama offers me a hard-boiled egg. I couldn't wait till the evening came! The family got together at the table. There was my bed in this room and I knew that I wasn't going to bed before the end of the celebration. The rules required having guests on seder, but who was willing to come to somebody else's home! However, Jews found the way out; the military sent out two privates to each Jewish house: it was good for the boys to celebrate with a family and for families to follow the rules.

There were dishes required by the Haggadah and other traditional Jewish food: stuffed fish [so-called gefilte fish], chicken broth with matzah kneidlakh, nicely smelling rich stew, tsimes, matzah puddings. My father reclined on cushions at the head of the table. He dressed up and had his tallit on. I was small and nobody seemed to take any account of me. However, I knew they couldn't have a holiday without me. At the start of seder my father would address me. I'd stand up and distinctly answer the four questions about the origin of the holiday: the family would all look at me and I'd feel proud. Then I'd fill everybody's glasses and my own. My father reads the Haggadah, the men repeat after him and the seder begins.

Frankly, I was upset that it was my brother Anchel to look for the afikoman and get a gift, but this was a custom and wasn't to be questioned. At a certain time my father left the table and opened the front door. It was cold and dark outside. My father pronounced: 'Whoever is hungry, come in to have a meal! Whoever is thirsty, come in for a drink!' I don't remember anybody coming in, but the



tradition was followed. The expectation of Elijah-ha-nevi was the highlight of the celebration. There was a glass of wine for him on the table, and he was expected to come in at night. I decided to stay awake till he came in, but of course, I fell asleep. The next morning I thought: well, maybe next time. When I fell asleep each time I plotted something else. I checked the level of wine in the glass in the morning, and when it looked as if there was less wine left I believed Elijah-ha-nevi had visited our house, indeed! This was the happiest holiday ever.

I also liked Rosh Hashanah and I started fasting on Yom Kippur at an early age. I didn't like the Sukkot: it was already cold and I didn't want to have meals in the sukkah. However, Papa made me put on something warm and come into the sukkah for a meal. I remember Chanukkah: the Chanukkah candle stand, the candles that my father lit in the evening, sweet doughnuts, the gifts and some money that I got. I liked all holidays, but seder in our family has particularly warmed my heart ever since.

I went to the Jewish elementary school Tarbut [12](#) at the age of six. Usually children went to school at the age of seven, but I and two other children who knew the alphabet and could read, were admitted to school. When Romanian inspectors came to the school, we had to hide away, because going to school at the age of six was against the rules. The following year I was admitted to the first grade. I was upset and cried bitterly, fearing that people might think that I had failed with my studies, but then I started getting all excellent marks and became the best pupil. I knew Hebrew and could read and write in Hebrew. I finished elementary school with the best marks. I had all 'tens' [the highest point in Romanian schools] marks in my school record card.

I wanted to continue my studies in the Romanian public gymnasium, but I didn't get the sufficient number of points [admission to the gymnasium was based on the results of Mathematics and dictation tests]. My sister Elka had finished this gymnasium with honors a few years before. Then she went to Bucharest, where she entered the University: Uncle Iosif Pagis advised her to enter the Pharmaceutical Faculty. Several years later Elka realized this wasn't what she wanted to do. She liked literature. While continuing her studies at the Pharmaceutical Faculty she entered the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy of this University. Elka graduated with two diplomas: in Pharmacology and Literature. She went to work in the Jewish school in the town of Arciz [today Ukraine]. She worked as a teacher. In 1933 she married Mendel Vinograd, the director of this school. When she heard of my failure at the entrance exams to this school, she arrived in Orhei and visited the gymnasium where everybody knew her. She demanded my written work and made sure that the mark given for it was fair. At her request I had another exam and entered the gymnasium.

At the end of my first year the average point of each pupil was written on a board. Olympia Machedon, the daughter of the director of the gymnasium, was the first on the list, Popuzha Popescu, the daughter of a policeman, was number two, number three was Olga Timozina, the daughter of a priest, the fourth was Sarrochka Beilis, a beautiful Jewish girl, and number five was Hana Muchnik. Senior gymnasium girls were asking who was this Hana Muchnik and I ran away humbly. Since then I was number two or three at the end of each year. I was awarded a letter of honor or a gift: books, as a rule. In the sixth grade I happened to be the first on the list and was highly disappointed, when I didn't get any gift. At the end of vacations I received a big parcel from Bucharest. My friend and I went to the post office to receive it: it contained sketch books and books of Romanian classical and contemporary writers.

The national composition of the gymnasium was diverse. There were Romanian, Moldovan and Russian girls in my class. Half of my classmates were Jewish girls. We got along well and were polite with each other. The Christian girls had religious classes, and so did the Jewish girls: we studied the basics of Judaism. On Jewish holidays the Jewish girls were given vacations. I remember mentioning to my friends my concerns about missing two days of school on Rosh Hashanah and having no notes from classes. Popuzha Popescu heard me saying this and offered me to come by her place and pick up her notes. I went to the policeman's home and knocked on the door. Nobody answered. The door was open and I stepped into the beautiful fore room. Then I humbly opened a few doors before I came onto the roofed terrace, where the policeman's family was sitting at the table. I apologized, but the policeman invited me to join them for lunch. Then Popuzha gave me her notes. We joined some kind of a scout organization at the gymnasium. We even wore neckties that looked like pioneer [13](#) neckties.

There were a number of Zionist organizations in Bessarabia in those years. My older brother Haim moved to Bucharest at the age of 15 and entered a vocational school. Haim became a high-skilled worker. He also became fond of Zionist ideas of restoration of Israel. He joined a Zionist organization of young people, I don't know the name of this organization, and was preparing for repatriation to Israel. In a camp in the Carpathians he met and fell in love with a Jewish girl named Tubele. When he told Mother about Tubele and his intention to marry her, our mother got very angry: Tubele came from a poor family and wasn't our equal. Haim left his fiancée and moved to Israel in 1927. He got married there and had a daughter. Haim was involved in the establishment of the kibbutz settlements in Israel. In his letters he tried to convince Anchel to move to Israel. Anchel moved to Palestine in 1936. However, shortly after he moved there, he was killed by terrorists.

I wouldn't say I had steady Zionist interests, but I joined the Maccabi [14](#) Zionist organization of young people to keep the memory of my brother. This organization also prepared us for repatriation to Israel. They stated that the establishment of our Jewish state must be peaceful. I attended this organization in secret. I don't think my gymnasium would have appreciated this had they known.

During the years of class struggle in Bessarabia some young people joined anti-Fascists and the others became Cuzists [15](#), but I was rather apolitical. I didn't even know who Lenin [16](#) was. I heard the name of Stalin, but I hardly knew anything about the Soviet Union. When the Red Army entered Orhei in late June 1940, it was something new and different for me. I had finished the gymnasium with honors by that time. Thus, before I could take my Baccalaureate exam [In Eastern Europe the Bachelor's degree, noted in the diploma refers to the graduation from high school], the Soviet rule was established. My friends and I decided to greet the Soviet Army. I dressed up and tied a red ribbon in my hair. I remember my father saying sadly seeing this: 'What are you so happy about, Daughter?'

Seeing the Red Army warriors we felt disappointed: they looked exhausted and dirty. A few days after the Soviet rule was established, the repression and arrests began. Our store was nationalized and they expropriated my grandfather's part of the house to accommodate some of the Red Army commanding officers. They also occupied our biggest room. My father was summoned to the NKVD office [17](#), but he said they treated him properly. They explained to him that nationalization was a program of the Soviet government and my father had no resentment toward the Soviet power.



I took up a short-term course of teachers' training. My sister had tried to teach me some Russian, but it didn't work. I came to the course hardly having any knowledge of Russian, but the others were no better in this regard. I finished this course two or three months later and received a job assignment to the Moldovan village of Malovata. I had tears in my eyes leaving home: this was my first departure from home. The school I was to work at was on the picturesque bank of the Dniestr. I liked the location and warm weather and I understood there were other places to live in besides Orhei. A few days later Mama arrived and rented a room for me and Sarrah Shoichetman from Orhei, who also came to work at the school. The school consisted of two classes: the 1st and the 2nd grades. Sarrah and I worked quietly in our first year there.

### During the war

In the middle of June 1941 I went home for vacation. I also took up a course of advanced teachers' training. On 22nd June we listened to Molotov's speech [18](#). He made the announcement about the start of the Great Patriotic War. I went to the center of town where people were gathering by the radio. At that time the first bombing started. People started to panic. We rushed to the basement of a house and waited till the bombing was over. Then I rushed home worrying about my family. I found Mama sobbing after me at home. Bombings occurred every day. We took hiding in the basement, but my father refused to hide away. He said nothing could happen to him at the synagogue and after each air raid alarm he ran to the nearest 'market-place' synagogue.

Elka arrived shortly before the war. Her husband was mobilized to the army. She had had a miscarriage that affected her fertility and she couldn't have children. My sister went to work at the Orhei Medical School teaching medical nurses for the army. When the evacuation began, the medical school arranged for a wagon for our family. We could load one piece of luggage onto it and had to follow the horse-drawn wagon walking. My sister tried to convince my parents to evacuate, but my mother said she wasn't going to walk and would try to find another wagon to depart. My sister and I agreed with our parents that we would meet across the Dniestr.

We left Orhei on 7th July. We walked for a few days and couldn't remember when we had our last meal. During air raids we took hiding in hay stacks and when they were over we buried the dead. When we approached a crossing on the Dniestr River, there was a crowd of people waiting for their turn to cross the river. The army units were the first ones to cross. My sister and I headed back to Orhei. The town was deserted, but my parents and aunt were there. They found no wagon and yet again refused to leave with us.

On 13th July my sister and I left the town another time. We crossed the Dniestr and stopped for a rest in a small forest. I had a red blouse on and had to change it: we were told to wear neutral colors for safety considerations. Then we headed to the railway station and after we covered a few kilometers we saw a train. There was a Ukrainian woman and her son on the open train car with some equipment loaded onto it: they didn't let us board the platform, but an officer, passing by, helped us onto the platform and told the woman off. We moved on, sitting with our backs to one another, but later we made friends with the guy and he was even courteous, helping me to jump off the train during raids. He also watched that we didn't walk too far from the train when it stopped.

At the Yasinovataya station [today Ukraine] somebody snatched my bag with our documents and 1000 rubles that I had. However, they dropped some of the documents, but the money was gone.

We moved on trying to escape from bombings and Fascists. At a station we heard an announcement: 'Attention of passengers! The train on the first line heads to Rostov, Stalingrad, Kuibyshev and Saratov.' We boarded this train and arrived at Rostov [today Russia]. From there we headed to the Northern Caucasus. At one station we bumped into Uncle Leibl's son Yasha. He asked us to take with us a box with silver tableware, but we had our hands full and my sister advised the boy to leave the silverware with some local residents.

Thus, we reached a village in Ordzhonikidze district [today Azerbaijan] in the Northern Caucasus, 2500 kilometers from Kishinev. We were assigned to a kolkhoz [19](#); I don't remember its name or location. My sister went to work as a teacher in a local school. I was young and strong and was sent to work at the threshing floor. I worked for two days and got fever measured at 40 degrees Celsius. I was taken to a hospital and the doctors there got together to decide about my condition. They were talking to one another, thinking that I couldn't hear them. However, I did hear that I had enteric fever. My doctor felt sorry for me and took care of me as he would of his own daughter. I wouldn't have survived if it hadn't been for him. My sister was unaware of what had happened to me. The daughter of the head of the kolkhoz, who was also in my ward and whose family brought her eggs, cottage cheese and sour cream pronounced through her delirium: 'Have you given food to Nyura – she called me by this Russian name – as I shall not eat the food, if she doesn't have it'. I asked the nurses to cut my hair short, but an old assistant doctor did what he could to avoid cutting my long hair. When my sister finally visited me, she cut my hair. As soon as I recovered, I developed pneumonia, but I survived again thanks to my young age and human kindness.

My sister's husband Mendel found us. Bessarabians weren't mobilized to the front-line forces, because the Soviet authorities didn't fully trust residents of the areas recently annexed to the USSR, and he was released [Editor's note: probably this fact had different reasons, since later on there were Bessarabians, as well as Bessarabian Jews in the Soviet army's front line troops]. Mendel carried me to the car waiting by the front door of the hospital and the three of us drove to Makhachkala [Dagestan, today Russia]. From there we took a boat across the Caspian Sea and from there we took a train to Tajikistan. Our destination was Stalinabad [Dushanbe since 1962, today capital of Tajikistan] where we were accommodated in a barrack for over 100 people. Mendel fell ill with typhus and my sister contracted it as well. A few days later the doctor, a pretty Ukrainian lady diagnosed me with typhus. I was taken to a hospital. It took me a long time to recover and I had to learn to walk anew. All tenants of the barrack fell ill with typhus. About seven of us were released at one time and we had to hold hands to get to our barrack across the town.

My sister met me. Mendel had been mobilized to the labor front [20](#) in the north and he occasionally sent us food parcels. A few months later we stopped receiving any parcels or even letters from him. Half a year later we received a letter where Mendel wrote that somebody had reported that during the Romanian rule he was a Zionist and an active participant of the Zionist movement. He was convicted to ten years of imprisonment and kept in a camp near Norilsk [Taymir, today Russia].

My sister Elka was a very strong person. She stood up to this disaster. She went to work as a pharmacist. She received rationed food with pork fat, or a pork head or offal. Besides, we had bread cards [21](#).

Life was improving. I made friends with Gita Luriye, a Jewish girl from Latvia. She convinced me to go to the course of medical nurses for the front. It lasted three months and I finished it with honors, but frankly, I didn't even know how to make an injection. One month later I was summoned to the military registry office. I went there, but when they found out that I was from Bessarabia they released me. It happened one more time with the same result, but when I was summoned there for the third time, the military commander told me to come back with a spoon and a mug. I packed my clothes and my sister went with me to see me off.

I didn't even realize that I was mobilized. The first sergeant inspected the line of girls and asked me where I was going. He said that if I was going to the front line I didn't need my suitcase. I was always sensitive to jokes and this time I burst into tears. So, he let me go back home, leave my suitcase there and take a blanket and a pillow with me. In the morning I came back to the unit again: this was the fifth reserve infantry regiment. We were accommodated in the barrack and received some old uniforms. Every day one of us was sent to the front line. I don't know whether I would have been sent to the front if I hadn't fallen ill with malaria. Shivering and fever were exhausting me. I felt like this every day. A professor of the institute of tropical diseases, whom I consulted, explained that I had been bitten by two mosquitoes and I had two types of malaria at the same time: three-day malaria and tropical malaria. I had treatment, but I couldn't overcome it until I finally returned to Moldova.

I was released. My sister helped me to get a job as a medical nurse in a hospital. It didn't take long for me to understand that this job wasn't good for me. When a patient died and the doctor asked me to turn him on his bed I was horrified and ran out of the ward. The doctor told me to think over whether I could be a medical worker. I quit the hospital. My sister helped me again. She helped me to get a job as a medical nurse at the blood transfusion facility. I received rationed food and worked there until the re-evacuation.

When in summer 1944 the liberation of Moldova began, my sister started packing to go back home. Elka wrote a letter to the People's Commissariat of Education in Soroki [Soroca in Moldovan]. Kishinev was still occupied. Shortly afterwards we received a response and started obtaining all necessary documents. We left home in December 1944. We took a train to Moscow where it took us two days to get tickets to Kishinev. It took us three days to get to Kishinev from Moscow. I had visited Kishinev twice before the war and admired the town. This time I saw it in ruins. We hired a wagon to take us to Orhei. The cabman, a young handsome Moldovan man, asked us about where we were coming from and where we worked. Being rather suspicious, I suspected that he probably had something negative on his mind and told my sister about my suspicions in Yiddish, but she calmed me down. When the guy heard that Elka was a teacher and was going to work in Orhei, he asked her whether she could help him to enter the teacher's training school. My sister told me in Yiddish that the guy had no evil thoughts.

## After the war

We got to the town at about two o'clock in the morning. The town was ruined [according to the official information, about 95 percent of the town was in ruins]. The central street was in ruins, overgrown with weeds. The guy took us in the direction of the light. This place happened to be a militia office and we wanted to stay there overnight. The militiaman on duty told us to leave the office. My sister told him we had nowhere to go and we spent the first night in our hometown by

the stove in the militia office.

The following day my sister met an acquaintance of hers, who gave us shelter. I went to where our house had been. I was born and grew up in this house, but I couldn't find anything. Some passers-by told me that the house was hit by a bomb and the locals disassembled the ruins. They told me about my parents and Aunt Beila, who died a terrible death. On the first day the Fascists gathered all Jews of the town at the quarry and killed them. [Editor's note: not all the Jews were gathered and killed during the first days. For further information, see glossary 22.] Those people told me they saw my mother, father and Aunt Beila walking there. I was sitting, where I was born and grew up, crying. Then I saw three acacia trees where I used to play as a child.

When my sister and I saw each other again, she told me what I had already been told: her colleagues told her the same story. Elka was told that when the town was liberated, the mass shooting site was dug up to discover the remains of the deceased. The documents of her friend Lyonia Averbukh and his wife were also found there. He was a successful lawyer and had an opportunity to evacuate, but he stayed, convinced by his Cuzist friend Papoy, who told him that not a single hair would fall from his head. However, even Papoy couldn't save his friend.

Our life was going on. My sister's husband was still in prison. Elka went to work at the Teachers' Training School, where she received a room. It was a little room, but there were two beds, a table, two chairs and even a stove in it. It was all right to live in it! I went to work as a cashier in a canteen. My sister kept telling me that I had to continue my studies at the Medical College. However, after having typhus twice and malaria I was too weak to go to study in a college. My sister told me to try at least a technical school. I entered the Financial School in Kishinev, the Department of Finance and Taxation.

I lived in a hostel and often went to Orhei to visit my sister. My sister and I were very close. I forgot the grudges of my childhood, when I thought the adults didn't like me and laughed at me. Elka was the dearest person to me. My older brother Haim lived in Israel, but we had no contacts with him. I received a stipend and Elka was supporting me. Of course, life was hard, particularly in 1946-47, when the people starved. However, I have the brightest memories of my student years. There were many Jewish students at my school and I had many Jewish friends. There was no anti-Semitism in those years.

However, I faced prejudiced attitudes during the issuance of job assignments [23](#). I requested a job in Orhei to be with my sister, but all Jewish students were assigned to the worst locations. I was sent to the godforsaken town of Bravicheny where no transportation was available. I had to walk there. Before long, I wrote a request to relocate me to Orhei and sent it to the Ministry of Finance. They relocated me to Susleny, 15 kilometers from Orhei. I worked in the financial department in Susleny for a few years. My boss was very good to me and helped me to get another assignment. I even had a choice between Bendery, Tiraspol or Beltsy and I chose Bendery.

In early 1953, I moved to work in this town. I worked as a financial officer in this town for 25 years. I received a small room in a shared apartment [24](#). This was the period of the state level anti-Semitism. I wouldn't say it affected me. I remember that during the period of the 'Doctors' Plot' [25](#), when all Jews felt that their people were endangered, my supervisor, basically a nice person, told me how she went to a Jewish doctor, who took a long time to examine her, probably intending to poison her. I listened to such things, but had to keep silent. When Stalin died in 1953, I didn't

grieve or cry. Somehow I knew he was the reason for many of our troubles.

My sister was a good teacher. She kept the fact that her husband was in prison secret, but shortly before 1953 her management declared that she would be fired, being the wife of an 'enemy of the people' [26](#). Now I had to support my sister both morally and financially. Fortunately, shortly after Stalin died, her husband Mendel was rehabilitated [25](#) and returned to Orhei and Elka returned to work.

I was already 30 years old. I knew I had to somehow take care of my personal life. Somebody introduced me to a single Jewish man in Bendery. His name was Isaac Fishman; he was five years younger than me. He was born in Bendery in 1928. I didn't feel any love toward Isaac, but I was much attracted by his having a big family. I was missing a big Jewish home and the way of life I was used to since my childhood. I gave my consent to marry him. So it happened that I never knew love for a man in my whole life.

In 1955 Isaac and I registered our marriage, and there was a small wedding dinner. I was well-respected at work and shortly after the wedding I received a two-bedroom apartment. Isaac was a mechanic and a highly-skilled one. He was good to me and we had a good life. My husband's family celebrated all Jewish holidays, and my husband and I joined them and I felt like I was back in my childhood again. We also celebrated Pesach and had matzah at home. I wasn't religious and my husband was an atheist, but we liked getting together at the table and giving and receiving gifts, being attached to the traditions of our ancestors.

In 1957 my dearest little daughter was born. I named her Goldina after my mother. She was a sweet and lovely girl. She studied well at school and had the dream to study in a college. We led a modest life. Financial employees had low salaries. However, we had everything we needed. I could even afford to take my daughter to the seashore every summer. Perhaps, this wasn't good for her. Goldina suddenly fell seriously ill at the age of 17: she happened to have lupus, a rare disease of the immune system. The doctors didn't know the cause of the disease, but they said it might have been radiation at the sea. My dear little daughter died in 1974, and my life lost any sense whatsoever. I didn't live my life: I existed. Isaac was also much affected by our daughter's death. Being a man, he couldn't show his tears and suffering, but it was very hard on him. In 1976 my husband died from a heart attack. I buried him beside my daughter in the town cemetery in Bendery. There were no rituals, but my father-in-law recited the mourning prayer.

My sister and her husband Mendel lived in Kishinev. Mendel was very ill. He couldn't work after he returned from jail. He received a miserable pension. They received a small two-bedroom apartment. They were very close. They went for walks and talked a lot as if to compensate for the years they had spent apart. In 1978 Elka became a widow. Two years after her husband's death she developed diabetes and had her leg amputated. I retired to take care of Elka in Kishinev. Some time later I exchanged my apartment in Bendery for one in Kishinev for my sister and me to have a bigger apartment. I tended to Elka for five years before she died in 1984.

In the early 1990s my brother Haim found me. He lived in Haifa in Israel and I went to visit him. I was happy to have one member of my family in Israel. I admired Israel. What a beautiful country! What nice people: smiling, friendly people, the sea, so much sun! My brother was a worker at a plant, but he has had a very good life. He and his wife have a nice spacious apartment. Unfortunately, he lost his only daughter in the 1980s. She was seriously ill and died young. I was

considering moving to Israel, but I've always been so irresolute and I feared changing my life at my old age. I feared loneliness in a nice, but different country. Haim didn't try to convince me, giving me an opportunity to make my own decision. When leaving Israel, I knew it was my farewell to my brother. He died a few years ago. In the mid-1980s I visited Orhei and went to the cemetery. All of a sudden I stopped still, staggered. There was a gravestone with my grandfather's name engraved on it: Joiseph Muchnik. Since then I've been visiting my grandfather's grave and the mass grave where my parents ended their days.

I am very ill and hardly ever go out. I wouldn't have lived this long, if it hadn't been for the support of Jewish organizations and Hesed [27](#). They give me moral, physical and financial support. There is a visiting nurse tending to me. I have many friends in Hesed. I attend the Day Center where I am taken by a bus and where we listen to Jewish songs. I read Jewish publications. I return to my little town in my thoughts. I would like to immortalize the memory of my dear ones and I write articles to our Jewish newspaper. I think, this story that I'm telling today, will also help to keep the memory of my family and the past of a little Jewish town in Bessarabia.

## Glossary:

### **1 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dniestr 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 Moldova.

### **2 Baal Shem Tov (The Besht) (1698-1760)**

The founder of the Jewish mystic movement called Hasidism. Born in Okup, a small village in Western Ukraine, he was orphaned at the age of 5 and was raised by the local community. He would often spend his time in the fields, woods and mountains instead of school. He worked as a school aid and later as a shammash. He got married and settled in the Carpathian mountains not far from Brody. He studied alone for seven years and began to reveal himself in 1734. Moving to Talust, he gained a reputation as a miracle worker and soul master. Then he moved to Medzhibozh in Western Ukraine where he lived and taught for the remainder of his life. His teachings were preserved by his disciple Yakov Yosef of Polonoye.

### **3 Hasid**

The follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles.



Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

#### **4 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during 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.

#### **5 Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution the national assembly of Moldavians convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldavian state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldovan capital in January 1918. Upon Moldova's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania: the Moldovans accepted the annexation without any preliminary condition.

#### **6 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

#### **7 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.

#### **8 Odessa**

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41 percent of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were cheders in 19 prayer houses.

#### **9 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of

the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **10 GULAG**

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

## **11 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)**

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

## **12 Tarbut schools**

Elementary, secondary and technical schools maintained by the Hebrew educational and cultural organization called Tarbut. Most Eastern European countries had such schools between the two world wars but there were especially many in Poland. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the education was Zionist oriented.

## **13 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.

## **14 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi.

The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

### **15 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian Fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent Fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. In 1919 Cuza founded the LANC, which became the National Christian Party in 1935 with an anti-Semitic program.

### **16 Lenin (1870-1924)**

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

### **17 NKVD**

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

### **18 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On 22nd June 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **19 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 percent of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

**20 Labor army:** it was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war

## **21 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was abolished in 1947.

## **22 Kishinev Ghetto**

The annihilation of the Jews of Kishinev was carried out in several stages. With the entry of the Romanian and German units, an unknown number of Jews were slaughtered in the streets and in their homes. About 2,000 Jews, mainly of liberal professions (doctors, lawyers, engineers), and local Jewish intellectuals, were systematically executed. After the wave of killings, the 11,000 remaining Jews were concentrated in the ghetto, created on 24th July 1941, on the order of the Romanian district ruler and the German Einsatzkommando leader, Paul Zapp. The Jews of central Romania attempted to assist their brethren in the ghetto, sending large amounts of money by illegal means. A committee was formed to bribe the Romanian authorities so that they would not hand the Jews over to the Germans. In August about 7,500 Jewish people were sent to work in the Ghidighici quarries. That fall, on the Day of Atonement (4th October), the military authorities began deporting the remaining Jews in the ghetto to Transnistria, by order of the Romanian ruler, Ion Antonescu. One of the heads of the ghetto, the attorney Shapira, managed to alert the leaders of the Jewish

communities in Bucharest, but attempts to halt the deportations were unsuccessful. The community was not completely liquidated, however, since some Jews had found hiding places in Kishinev and its vicinity or elsewhere in Romania. In May 1942, the last 200 Jews in the locality were deported. Kishinev was liberated in August 1944. At that time no Jews were left in the locality.

### **23 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory two-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.

### **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.

### **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 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

### **26 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

### **27 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 Hased helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hased 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 Hased 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 Hased centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.