Polina Leibovich

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Kishinev
Moldova
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Polina Leibovich is a short young-looking lady, with dark hair with hardly any gray streaks. She has smooth skin with a slightly pink complexion. She speaks looking at her counterpart intently. One can observe a strong and independent character and a great sense of dignity behind her pleasant and gentle manners. During our conversation, Polina asked for a break every now and then. She has hypertension and suffers from frequent headaches. Being 79 years old, Polina still shows interest in people and the taste of life: during intervals she willingly talked about literature, theater and modern cinema. She lives in a two-bedroom apartment with all comforts on the first floor of an apartment building in the quiet Rykhanovka district in the center of Kishinev. Polina leases a smaller room to two students of Kishinev University - she likes having young company. Polina's room is clean and spacious. There is a couch covered with a plaid, a big cabinet with a cupboard and a bookcase by the wall, a low table and two armchairs by the window in her room. She willingly agreed to tell us the story of her life and her family, though she mentioned at the very beginning that she wasn't going to talk about the Holocaust. However, at the end of our discussion she told us a few episodes from this tragic period of her life. She wanted to mention the people who helped her to survive. We sat at the big dinner table during our conversation having tea with candy which has been Polina's weakness since childhood.

My family backgrownd

When I was born, my parents were old people, so they told me about my grandparents. My maternal grandfather, Gersh Iris, came from Kishinev in Bessarabia 1. My grandfather was a soldier in Nikolai's army 2. He served in the tsarist army for 25 years. I don't know whether he was a cantonist 3, but he never quit his Judaic faith. According to my mother, my grandfather had a

business and provided well for his family. My grandmother, Cipora, was a housewife like all Jewish women at that time. I only know four of my grandparents' children, including my mother.

My mother's older brother, Samuel Iris, was an actor. I don't know what town he lived in, but he worked in the popular Jewish drama troupe of Fischzon touring across Ukraine. Uncle Samuel moved to South America before I was born where he wrote plays in Yiddish for the Jewish theater. I don't know whether he had a family or when he died.

My mother's second brother, Yakov, was also born in Kishinev. When the Romanians occupied Kishinev in 1918, he moved to Paris, France, with his family. I can't remember what he did for a living. I think he was a businessman and he must have been successful. His family was very wealthy. Yakov had three sons, my cousin brothers. One of them was called Shymon. He was an engineer, and then there was Avraam, another son, who was an artist. I don't know the name of the third son or his occupation. One of the brothers had a son, born in France. His name was Lucien and at home he was called Loulou. Loulou was a very beautiful child and once he won the 18th place at a beauty contest. My mother told me about it, and the family was very proud of him. Loulou graduated from the Medical Department of the University. He worked as a doctor, and he still lives in Paris. I correspond with him. I have a good conduct of French, and this correspondence is no problem for me.

My mother's youngest sister, Rachil, completed the gymnasium in Kishinev during the rule of Nicolas II [4]. Rachil had a fiancé whose name was Lampert. He moved to America in the 1910s and settled down in New York. She followed him there and they got married. Rachil's husband had a network of textile stores. Aunt Rachil was a housewife. Her daughter was born in the late 1920s. She was named after my grandmother - Cipora. Later, her name changed to Zora. Zora was an actress. She could play the piano very well. Aunt Rachil kept in touch with our family before and after the war [Great Patriotic War] [5]. Aunt Rachil and her husband lived a long and happy life. She died in 1968 at the age of 88. Her husband died a few years earlier. Zora is about seventy now. She lives in New York. She studied French to be able to correspond with me.

My mother, Shyfra Sohis [nee Iris], was born in Kishinev in 1877. She was short, had a nice physique, big blue eyes and dark hair. She was extremely kind and gentle. My mother was the oldest child in the family and the family couldn't afford to pay for her complete education. That's why my mother finished four years in the gymnasium and got married at the age of 16.

My paternal grandfather, Rahmiel Sohis, came from Latvia where his family resided in a small Jewish town. My grandfather was a rabbi, a teacher, as my father used to say, and all the Jews of the town went to ask for his advice. My grandfather died young. I don't know when the family moved to Kishinev, but my father was born in Kishinev in 1869. All I know about my paternal grandmother is that her name was Shyfra just like my mother's. She was a housewife. I faintly remember my father's sister, Sarah, who also lived in Kishinev with her family. In my early childhood I met her and her children. I know that they survived the war, but I don't know what happened to them then, perhaps, they moved abroad.

My father, Yakov Sohis, was born in 1869. My grandfather insisted that my father finished a yeshivah. He was very well educated in Judaism. He knew the Talmud and Tannakh and was interested in the Jewish philosophy. In his youth he worked with my maternal grandfather, Gersh Iris. That was when my father met my mother. They liked each other and got married in 1893. The

bride was 16 and the bridegroom was 24 years old. Of course they had a traditional wedding under the chuppah. After she got married my mother wore a wig that Jewish women were required to wear. In the only photograph of this period she wears a wig, but later she quit wearing a wig. After the wedding my parents settled down with Grandpa Gersh. After my grandpa died, my parents opened a dairy store that became the start of my father's business. I know very little about my parents' life before my brother Shymon was born, though this is quite a long period of time. My brother Shymon was born on 17th March 1918, when my mother was 42 years old. I was born six years later, on 2nd April 1924. I was named Cipora after my grandmother.

At that time my father owned a store of men's clothes on Aleksandrovskaya Street. I know little about his business, though I know that my father made charity contributions to the Jewish community like all other wealthy Jews. We had a big house in the wealthy Jewish neighborhood, Irinopolskaya Street. There were three, three-bedroom wing annexes in the yard. They also belonged to my father and he rented them out. There was the mansion of Perelmuter, a wealthy Jew in Kishinev, near our house. The lawyer, Levenstein, and his family lived near him. They were educated and respectable people, and our family had good neighborly relations with them. There was a wealthy Romanian or Moldovan family living in another mansion, but we didn't know them. There were five rooms, a kitchen and back rooms in our house. My parents had a bedroom and Shymy – that was how we called my brother at home – and I had our own rooms, there was also a big living room and a dining room. We had ancient furniture of red wood, velvet curtains and crystal chandeliers. There was a piano in the living room, but I didn't study music. Unfortunately, I have no ear for music, though I love and understand it.

I remember that my parents loved each other dearly. My father was a big tall man with a small beard and moustache. When he would introduce my mother to somebody, he would say, 'You see this small woman. Oh, she is worth a fortune!' There was a warm atmosphere at home; they had such a beautiful life together. I never heard one swear-word at home. My mother was so smart, kind and gentle. She always wore a hat to go out, dressed like a dame, and wore her golden jewelry. I remember that she had a nice silver purse – it looked like silver net. My father was very witty. He was a big humorist and could make people laugh. I never saw him sad. He was always full of energy and optimism. He wasn't fanatically religious; there was even some frivolity in his character, but he prayed every day. He never started anything without praying first. He started every morning with a prayer with his tallit and tefillin on. My father always had a yarmulka on at home. My mother also taught me to pray in Hebrew, I can still remember it: 'Shema Yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai ehad…' 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One'… this is what I think it means. I had a small siddur in my childhood. I still have a siddur, though I don't think I am a fanatic believer.

My mother was a housewife and we had a housemaid to help my mother do the cleaning and some housekeeping while my mother cooked herself. She made delicious Jewish food: gefilte fish was number one, of course. Jews like gefilte fish. She also made chicken broth, yeisek flesh – sweet and sour meat stew. My mother made delicious pancakes from stretch dough. It stretched like parchment paper – very thin. She filled them with cottage cheese adding fried onions – very delicious. Our family also liked pte [petcha] – hardly anybody would know the word. It was cooked from calf legs bought at the market. It was cut to smaller pieces, cold water was added and it was cooked for seven to eight hours like holodets [holodets: a cold meat dish, usually made of boiled

bones with little meat on them, the meat is mixed with the bouillon and cooled, after which it becomes jelly-like because of the high percentage of gelatin in it]. Two hours before the end of cooking, onions, carrots, garlic and spices were added, and then vinegar or lemon juice. It was served hot, but I never ate it for I didn't like it unlike the rest of the family. I liked Moldovan mamaliga [boiled corn flour] that my father cooked. This was the only dish my mother allowed him to cook. When the family felt like having mamaliga, my father made it. It goes without saying that my family followed the kashrut.

Besides a housemaid, there was my nanny living in the house with us. She was a Russian woman, rather old. I don't remember her name; I just called her 'nanny'. My mother said that the first thing my nanny did, when she came to live with us in the house and heard that my name was Cipora, she said, 'What kind of name is that? I will call her Polina, that's it!' So, it was her initiative that everybody in the family began calling me Polina and now everybody calls me so. Only in my documents I am Cipora. The nanny was very good and was devoted to our family. She was like a member of our family, but she was quite a drunkard, as they say. Often a policeman took me back home from a stroll for she would be lying on the pavement drunk while I would quietly play beside her, when they found me. My mother was terrified by this situation saying each time, 'This was the last time. It's impossible to go on like this', but my nanny didn't have a place to go to, and my mother was so kind that she tolerated her. She lived her life with us. She loved me and loved our family. At the age of three or four, I was sent to the kindergarten and not to a Frebelichka [Froebel Institute] 6.

My mother was involved in charity activities along with other Jewish women in the community. They were called patroness dames. There were two marble plaques with the names of these dames on the wall of the choral synagogue, and on one plaque there was the name of Shyfra Sohis. My mother sacrificed herself for the sake of others. She was ill having calcula in her gall bladder. She had attacks of acute pain at times, but as soon as she felt better she got up and hurried to the lower side of town where poor Jews lived. She distributed special coupons to poor Jews and they would go to the Jewish community to receive food products.

My father used to say, 'You really have no love for yourself. You've just suffered from pain. We were fussing around you not knowing what to do, then you are up and on the run again.' This is the way my mother was. Besides, poor people always came to our house. My mother appointed the time for them to come. She gave them wood or food. She gently told me, 'You go open the shed and leave him alone there. Let him take as much as he needs.' We were a hospitable family. I try to follow this tradition in the memory of my mother. There was also a children's home named after Babich in the community. Babich was probably a founder and chief contributor to the house. My mother also worked there. She couldn't stay quietly at home. She just had to go out and help people.

Our family observed Jewish traditions like all other Jewish families. We strictly observed Sabbath. My mother baked challah in a special oven. I also had one recently, but I gave it away. My mother cooked cholent, chicken broth and fish for Sabbath. She left the food on a special grate with lamps above it to keep the food hot. On Friday evening my mother lit two candles in silver candle stands. My father always had the company of a poor Jewish man, when he came home from the synagogue for Sabbath. This was a rule. Before a meal my father always recited a prayer in Hebrew, and my mother translated it for me. On the afternoon of Sabbath we always sang songs called zmires. We

did no work on Sabbath; we didn't even turn on the lights. My father had many religious books, and every week he read me an article from the Torah which is habitual for Jewish families. I could listen to him for hours. I remember that Shymy also sat with us. My father read in Hebrew, also called loshen koidesh ['holy language' in Yiddish], and of course, interpreted each word to us.

Growing up

Pesach was the main and my favorite holiday. Shymy and I got presents for sure. I usually got a pair of patent leather shoes for Pesach. There were preparations for the holiday. In fall my mother started making goose fat: she had a special board and utensils to melt the fat. This fat was kept in a special jug in the attic where fancy crockery for Pesach was kept. Before Pesach the house was cleaned thoroughly. I remember that my mother thoroughly cleaned the kitchen utensils that she had no replacement for. All chametz was removed from the house. My mother also distributed coupons to the poor for them to receive food products for the holiday. My mother took the crockery from the attic after the house was cleaned up. It was beautiful crockery of thin china. There were silver wine glasses and silver tableware. The table was always covered with a beautiful white tablecloth.

At the end of the day, before seder, everything had to be ready. Undoubtedly there was fish, meat, matzah pudding and haroset – ground apples with wine and nuts to symbolize the clay that Jews worked with, when they were slaves. There were candles lit in silvery candle stands on the table and the seder began. We always had quests on seder. My father and brother conducted the seder: this was a tradition. My father told us about Moses who led our people from Egypt. My brother, Shymy, asked the four questions – fir kashes. He would ask, 'Why are we sitting on this night? My mother or I didn't say anything, but I knew the fir kashes by heart. I'm not sure, but it seems we also sang zmires on Pesach. My parents and whoever was our guest had their glasses filled with wine. The children also had a little in their glasses. Each adult was supposed to drink four glasses, but I don't remember for sure whether they did.

I had a little thick glass with a little handle called a koise. There was a big copper glass for Elijah the Prophet on the table. It was polished and shining as if it was made of gold and there was the candle light reflecting in it. The glass was filled with wine. My father used to say, 'Look carefully. Elijah will come at midnight and open the door.' We left the door open for him to come in. Seder began early in the evening, but ended very late. Gradually, the scene became blurry in my eyes: the candlelight and the shining glass for Elijah. I always fell asleep and never knew whether he came or not. And I never saw him.

Rosh Hashanah was a wonderful holiday. I loved it. It is the Jewish New Year. My parents went to the Choral Synagogue. My mother took me with her and we sat on the upper tier with the other women. Before we started going to the Choral Synagogue we went to another synagogue which I don't remember. There was a festive meal on Rosh Hashanah with apples and honey, a round-shaped challah loaf and broth with mendelakh – little pieces of dough fried in oil.

On Judgment Day [Yom Kippur] my parents fasted and so did I. I fasted at least till two o'clock. I started fasting at about the age of 14. My father came from the synagogue in the evening and had a shot of vodka with bronfn and lekakh. Bronfn is vodka and lekakh is honey cake. Eggs were frothed to make lekakh. Then the family sat down to dinner. I remember that on Yom Kippur my mother served broth with little dumplings filled with meat. They are called pelmeni in Russian.

I liked Simchat Torah very much. My father used to hold me and go for a walk, when I was small. I always waited for Simchat Torah with a special feeling. We, children, walked with little red flags and red lollypops on sticks. I remember the Torah being carried out and we kissed it stretching our little arms. I remember this well. How wonderful those years were!

On Sukkot we made a sukkah in the yard from special planks that were kept in the attic. On top, the sukkah was covered with straw or reeds – I don't remember for sure. We got together with our Jewish neighbors for celebrations and had meals in the sukkah all week long. Sukkot is celebrated in fall. When it was cold, we wrapped ourselves in warmer clothes, but still had meals in the sukkah.

On Chanukkah my father gave me Chanukkah gelt. I don't remember what I did with it – bought sweets, I guess. I also remember merry dreidel whipping tops. We had a big silver chanukkiyah on the window. Every day another candle was lit in it.

On Purim my mother made hamantashen for our family and for poor families. She visited them before Purim taking baskets full of presents to them a week before Purim. My parents were rather old and we didn't have noisy celebrations at home, but there were jokes, and children visiting and we had fancy dress costumes on.

I was a stubborn girl and wanted my wishes to come true. It was hard for my mother to handle me and she often said, 'I will send you to school'. I was six, when my mother had enough of my unbearable character and sent me to school. It was a Romanian elementary school one house away from our house. The teaching was in Romanian at the school. My parents didn't know Romanian. We spoke Yiddish or Russian at home, so I had to learn Romanian. I don't remember having any problems in this regard. I did well at school, but I was probably a hoyden. I remember an incident, when I was in the fourth grade. There were only girls in my class. I demonstrated my adroitness to them running on the desks, when a teacher walked into the classroom. She asked, 'What is this? Stretch out your hand!' Hitting pupils on their hands with a ruler was a common punishment.

I was very independent and spoiled – hitting me on my hand? No way! I jumped off the desk, grabbed my bag and I even remember the words I said, 'Draku suei schcoala sa!' [God damn this school!], and went home proudly. At home I said I wasn't going to that school again. A week passed and then the teacher came to our home. I remember her last name – Pekush – she was Czech, it seems. She came in and asked, 'What's happened?' My mother replied, 'I don't know, she doesn't want to go to school, but she wouldn't say why.' I was there in the room. I guess they found the right words to convince me to go back to school. That's what I was like.

I adored my brother Shymy. He was six years older than me and I was jealous that Mother bought him whatever he wanted. Shymy was a little boy, when our parents bought him a big toy car with pedals that he drove in the yard. At 13 Shymy had his bar mitzvah. I remember many guests and they all brought him presents. When I was at school, he already studied in the lyceum and was popular with other students in Kishinev. He was good at basketball and volleyball; he was the captain of these teams in the Jewish sports community Maccabi 7. When on holidays Maccabi teams took part in parades, my brother always marched in the first rows.

Shymy was very handsome. He was tall and slim and had a special bearing – royal and sportive. I always went to watch his teams playing and I always sat as close as I could, though Shymy asked

me to sit further behind fearing that the ball might hit me. I always cheered for his team and wanted everybody to know that I was his sister. I was jealous when Shymy went on dates in the evening and asked him to take me with him. Sometimes he took me with him. Shymy taught me to dance tango – this dance was popular at the time. Tango became the only dance I can dance. He was also a member of Betar 8, I remember that Betar members were ardent Zionists and so was Shymy.

After graduating from elementary school, I went to the French Jeanne D'Arc gymnasium. It was a private gymnasium, the most prestigious and the most expensive in town. There was competition to enter the Dadiani and Regina Maria gymnasiums, but not to our gymnasium. They charged a lot and admitted all who could afford to send their children to study there. We had French teachers, Monsieur Clemant, the language teacher, Madame Pobelle, and Madame Pizolit. They were intelligent and educated people knowing the etiquette. We had summer and winter uniforms. The winter uniform was a black gown with a white collar and the school emblem on it, dark blue coats and hats with small rims, decorated with a ribbon from the same fabric. In summer we wore skirts and white blouses.

During the war

When the fascists came to power in Romania, we began to wear a plain uniform of a military kind. On holidays the flag of the gymnasium was raised in the yard. The biggest national holiday in Romania was Zece May, on 10th May 9, 'Unire principatelor' – Union of all principalities. At the start of each academic year there was also a flag raised by the honored gymnasium students. I remember I was authorized to raise the flag – I was tall and slim. I've never been a girl of fashion. I like plain clothes. All gymnasium students wanted to be kind to me knowing what kind of a brother I had. They walked with me during the intervals. Shymy's girlfriend, Gusia Necler, was my special friend. She was about two years older than me.

My favorite subjects in the gymnasium were botany and natural sciences. I liked flora and animals, but the French language was number one. I could read in French for days, and I liked reading aloud to hear myself. Our teachers told us that we had to read aloud to hear ourselves to master the pronunciation. I could read books in French and this helped me to enrich my vocabulary. I always looked up new words in the dictionary. I didn't do that well in math, and in senior grades my parents even hired a private teacher for me. In Kishinev it was quite common to hire the gymnasium graduates or senior students to give private classes, so I had one. They were mostly Jews since it was more difficult for Jews to find jobs in Kishinev, and they gave private classes.

There was no anti-Semitism in the gymnasium. My closest and best friend was Mania Feider, a Jewish girl. Her father was a commercial agent, and her mother was a housewife. They were wealthy, but they didn't own a house. They rented an apartment. We spent all our free time together. I visited Mania and she visited me at home. We trusted each other with our secrets and read books together. Mania and I liked knitting and embroidery. Mania perished in the Kishinev Ghetto 10 during the war.

The Kishinev of my childhood and youth wasn't so big. Its population was less than one hundred thousand. [Polina is wrong here, according to the all-Russian census in 1897 Kishinev had 108,483 residents, 50,237 of who were Jews.] There was an upper and a lower town. The lower town was a poor and dirty neighborhood. The upper town was a fashionable place, particularly Sadovaya,

Nikolayevskaya and Aleksandrovskaya Streets. There were posh stores on Aleksandrovskaya Street. One of the biggest stores was the Barbalat garment store. Perhaps, Barbalat was the name of the owner. Its owners shipped their goods from France and other European countries. I remember that they also sold some clothes from my father's store. There was also a shoe store, I don't remember the name. These stores were for wealthy people.

There were also small stores. Most of them belonged to Jewish owners, but there were also Russian-owned stores. I can't say now whether they were open on Saturdays, but I can say for sure that if they were, there weren't Jewish shop assistants working in this case. There were also street vendors. One of them was a Greek vendor who sold ice-cream in waffle cones. It was delicious ice cream far better than what they offer nowadays. In winter this Greek man sold khalvitsa, an extremely delicious oriental sweet toffee. The children liked it a lot. My mother didn't allow me to eat khalvitsa outside. Imagine me eating khalvitsa in the street! This would have been bad manners. There were numerous confectioneries in the town selling cakes, hot chocolate, delicious nut khalva. There was an expensive Zamfiresku cafe on the central street. Businessmen or enamored couples met there in the afternoon.

There were horse-drawn cabs and trams running along Nicolayeskaya and Harlampievskaya Streets. Before the Soviet regime [1940] they were almost empty and hooting: Dong! Dong! During the Soviet power they were overcrowded and hooted the same. During the Romanian regime a tram ticket cost 30 bans. When my mother gave me money to take a tram I saved it to go to the cinema. A ticket to a movie cost 18 Leu, it was expensive. Since I didn't want to ask my parents for the money to the cinema, I tried to save. One paid for an entrance ticket to a movie and could stay in the cinema as long as they wished. In Kishinev there were a few cinema theaters: Odeon on Mikhailovskaya Street, and Coliseum on Alexandrovskaya Street. I remember silent movies, when there was a pianist playing. I remember the stars of silent movies: Rudolf Valentino, Mary Pickford.

Kishinev residents used to walk along Aleksandrovskaya Street near the Triumphalnaya Arc. Mothers and nannies took little children for walks on the boulevard. Young people went for walks in the town park where there was a monument of Stefan the Great [The ruler of the Moldova principality in 1457 - 1504, who conducted the policy of centralization]. I liked going to this park to sit on a bench with a book and then I secretly watched the enamored couples. There was a central library on Alexandrovskaya Street near a big bank with two stone lions at the entrance where my mother and I used to borrow books.

There was an Agricultural College and a Religious Faculty in Kishinev and most Jews left Bessarabia to study abroad. Those who wanted to study medicine went to Italy. Graduates from Italian medical institutions were regarded as good doctors in Kishinev. My brother Shymy went to the University of Bucharest after finishing the lyceum in 1936. He never finished it due to persecution and abuse of Jews that started in Romania. Shymy was proud and independent. He had a fight with the Cuzists [11] once and then he had to leave Bucharest for the fear of his life. He came home and said, 'I won't study there any longer. I'll go to Palestine. Palestine is my Motherland and I'll move there anyway.'

In 1938, when he was twenty, he moved to Palestine with other halutzim [halutz is a pioneer in Hebrew – participant of the Jewish settlement Erez Yisrael from the late 19th to the early 20th century]. There were 300 of them on the Greek boat 'Aspir.' They paid the captain and he took

them on board in a Mediterranean post. The boat arrived in the harbor of Haifa, but the passengers weren't allowed to get off board. Palestine was under the British mandate and the Brits didn't accept Jews. They were at sea for three months with hardly any food or water before they managed to get off-board. From there they were sent to a quarantine camp.

We didn't hear from Shymy for a long time and were very concerned. My mother and I even went to a fortune teller. She said, 'Your son will work and will have a very good life.' We believed her and looked forward till we could see each other again, but this wasn't to be. World War II, fascism, began. When in 1940 there was the Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union 12, my father was ruined. The store and houses were taken away from us. My father had to go to the police station many times and each time he said 'good bye' thinking that it was for good. I don't know why we weren't sent away with other wealthy people that the Soviet power was deporting from Bessarabia in 1941. This was a terrible time!

There were other families living in the house, one family in each room, this was a real communal apartment 13. We stayed to live in the living room. One NKVD 14 officer, who came to search the house wanted to occupy the living room, but this time my mother was firm. 'Pick your hat, you aren't staying here! The three of us are enough for this room.' And he left. The gymnasiums were converted to schools and had numbers [see school #] 15. Most of them became Russian schools, and there were few Moldovan ones. By that time I had finished six grades in the gymnasium and went to the ninth grade of the Russian railroad school #1. Though my Russian was poor I picked it up quickly since we sometimes spoke Russian at home. I was doing all right at school.

Our family didn't have anything to live on. We leased a corner in our living room to a man from Russia. So there were four of us sharing the room: my mother, my father, I and this man. He was a Soviet official staying with us temporarily waiting for his wife and son. He was a decent and honest man and paid us his rental fee for the corner. My parents also took work to do at home like sewing buttons on clothes. Probably, one of my father's former suppliers helped my father to get this job. My father was 73 and my mother was 64 years old. What could they do? I couldn't wait till my summer vacations when I hoped to find a job to help my parents, but then the war began on 22nd June 1941. Germany attacked the USSR.

We didn't evacuate. My mother was very conservative. She didn't want to leave the place. I yelled, 'Mama, come on… Papa, you see, everybody is leaving!' My mother said, 'Can't you remember our life during the Romanian regime? Where would we go?' Of course, we knew about the fascists and how they treated Jews, but it was probably my parents' age that they didn't care, but they should have thought about me. Well, whatever the reasons, we happened to stay. When the Germans and Romanians occupied Kishinev, an officer of the German army, a Czech man, settled down with us. He talked with my parents. He was a good man. He used to say, 'Go away, they will kill you!' An old Jewish man, my father's acquaintance, who knew German, interpreted for us. He sent his son away and he, his wife and his old grandmother stayed home.

My parents should have done the same; they just didn't understand that they had to do it! Later, I met my father's acquaintance in the camp in Golta. [Following the Antonescu-ordered slaughter of the Jews of Odessa and Bessarabia, the Romanian occupation authorities deported the survivors to camps in the Golta district: 54,000 to the Bogdanovka camp, 18,000 to the Akhmetchetka camp, and 8,000 to the Domanevka camp. In Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot, with the Romanian

gendarmerie, the Ukrainian police, and Sonderkommando R, made up of Volksdeutsche, taking part. In January and February 1942, 12,000 Jews were murdered in the other two camps. A total of 185,000 Jews were murdered by Romanian and German army units]. He was alone and he said, ‘Polia [affectionate of Polina], I am all alone, and they will kill me one of these days’.

Before Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR, Romanian troops trained near Kishinev, and some high-rank Romanian officer stayed in our apartment. When the German and Romanian troops came to Kishinev in 1941, he came to see us and left a sign on the door that there was a Romanian officer staying there. It helped us to escape from searches for some time. However, in fall we were sent to the ghetto in Kishinev, and in January 1942 all inmates of the ghetto were taken across the Dnestr to Odessa region. My father was very ill, and I managed to get a place in a train car for him. This was the last time I saw him. My father was killed near the village of Yasinovo in Odessa region. My mother was with me. She couldn’t walk and we dragged her holding her by her arms. On the way they began to kill exhausted people. I survived by some miracle and ran out of this crowd. I didn’t care whether I would go alone or with the crowd and I escaped. It was a frosty night. It started snowing and there was wind. I didn’t see anything.

I knocked on the door of the first hut on my way. An old man’s voice said, ‘Go away, they will kill me because of you.’ I went to the cowshed. Though I was afraid of cows, I stayed there a whole night shivering from the cold. The old man saw me in the corner when he came to feed the cows in the morning. He asked, ‘What are you doing here?’ I couldn’t talk, when the Romanians were shooting at the people I screamed so loud that I tore my chords. I somehow explained who I was and he said, ‘You know, since you are here, come on in.’ They were an old Ukrainian couple. They burned my clothes as there were lice in them. Then they washed me. She rinsed my head with alkaline water; there was no soap. There were lice on each hair on my head and she was sitting brushing my hair to remove them. A complete stranger that she was! Then she gave me her dress and let me sit on the stove bench to warm up. I stayed there for two weeks before I restored my voice by having hot milk and honey.

The old man was the secretary of the village council of the kolkhoz 16, and he wanted to help me, but what could he do! He said there was Yuschiha Belinskaya, a lonely old woman living in a farm near the village of Bobrik: ‘You go there and tell her I sent you, but before you go to Bobrik to see Batko, also secretary of the village council, tell him that I’ve asked him to issue you a document with a stamp that you are baptized and that you are from the Odessa children’s home.’ The old man told me about the children’s home and how to get there for me to give correct answers in case they asked. Batko did everything as the old man requested and issued me a forged certificate, but he warned me to only show it to common people, not to any officials. So I headed to the farm of Yuschiha Belinskaya. She showed my document to her neighbors and allowed me to stay in her house. I stayed there till spring. In spring the old woman’s cousin brother, Vasia Belyi, came to stay in her house. He wanted the house considering her being old. He worked for the Germans and I grasped at once that he would even kill me himself or report on me to the Germans. I left Yuschiha.

I was captured in Bobrik. There were other Jews that they captured in the district. We were locked in a shed on the outskirts of the village. I was sure they were going to burn us. Women were sobbing and screaming, but it didn’t happen. Our guards were two red-head soldiers wearing German uniforms and they probably weren’t fascists. They let the men free as soon as night fell.

Then they began to let the women free in small groups. By the morning there was an old woman and I left, and they said, ‘Go where you want.’ This old woman and I went to the village of Lubashovka. Where were we to go? We had no idea, and we got to the gendarmerie. I don’t know what happened to the old woman, but I was taken for interrogation. A Romanian man interrogated me. There was an interpreter. I told my story and didn’t mention that I understood Romanian. He asked me who I was and I said that I was a soldier. He said, ‘Soldier? I will show you what kind of soldier I am. Puk, puk, puk – shi es gata [You’re done - in Romanian].’

I stood quietly pretending I didn’t understand. Then the interpreter took me to the shop where Jews from Lubashevka were working. I began to work in this shop and also told them that I was Russian and came from the Odessa children’s home. Once, a local Jewish man approached me, ‘You know I’ll help you. There is a woman whose children live in this house. She brought us food. I will talk to her. Maybe she will take you with her.’ This woman’s name was Nina Tsvetochnitsa. She went to the gendarmerie and said, ‘Why are you keeping her here? I know her well, she was in the children’s home with my children. Let her come with me.’ There, what great people I met. I stayed with her for some time. She also starved.

Then I ran away from Lubashevka and went to Golta. This happened in early 1944. In spring, when the Soviet troops were approaching, the Romanians had other things to think about than us. A local girl approached me and said, ‘We are Baptists and we want to take a Jewish girl with us.’ She told me to follow her. I stayed with them till the Soviet troops came. After the liberation I went to work in the village of Gandrabury, Ananiev district, Odessa region. It was a big village and there was a ten-year school where I worked as elementary school teacher. I was eager to go back to Kishinev, though nobody waited for me there, but somehow I believed that there was a good life there and people were dressed nicely like before the war and I was ashamed of the shabby clothes I had. Then I thought ‘be what may’ and went to Kishinev on summer vacations. I went to the university and ascribed myself to the Faculty of Moldovan language and literature. I needed a certificate to obtain a letter of invitation to go back to Kishinev. I obtained a letter, went back to Gandrabury, went to Ananiev, and submitted this certificate to the district prosecutor, which enabled me to return to Kishinev. This was the only possible way during Stalin’s regime.

Shortly afterward, when I recovered from the horrors I went through, I wrote to Aunt Rachil in America. I told her about my mother and father’s death, asked her whether she had any information about Shymy since he was the only close person I had. I had a good memory and remembered two addresses of my aunt in New York: Ardel Street and Pickman Street. I sent the letter having little hope it would reach her, but a few months later I received her response. My aunt wrote to me that Shymy was alive, and sent me his photograph where he wore a military uniform. She wrote to him about me and our parents. Then I received a long letter from my brother. It made a long journey before I got it. He wrote about his life in Palestine. He worked a lot. He delivered milk to customers, washed cars in a garage and picked any job and studied simultaneously. Aunt Rachil sent him money and he graduated from the University of Jerusalem and became an engineer. During World War II, Shymy volunteered to the British army to fight against Nazis. He was an officer and had a higher education. He had awards. My brother was a brave man. In Palestine Shymy changed his surname from Sohis to Sofar.

I learned about his life from Aunt Rachil. Occasionally I received letters from him. During the Soviet times it wasn’t safe to keep in touch with relatives abroad [17]. When Shymy’s dream came true and

the Jewish state was established, Shymy took part in the war for independence in 1948, when the armies of five Arab states attacked Israel. Shymy got married before Israel was established. His wife, Pnina, arrived in Palestine from Poland with her parents at the age of eight. She got a medical education and worked as a cosmetologist. Later, she quit her job and became a housewife. They have no children. Shymy became a professional military. He participated in the Six-Day-War 18 in 1967, and in the War on Judgment Day in 1973 [see Yom Kippur War] 19. He took part in four wars. They live in Rishon Le Ziyon.

I corresponded with Aunt Rachil. She sent me parcels and tried to help me as much as she could. In the first letter my aunt wrote, 'Maybe you'll come to America?' I couldn't explain that this was impossible considering the Soviet regime. Then she wrote, 'You must have good friends and can't leave them.' It never occurred to her that nobody would let me out of the country and that I might have been arrested if I tried.

I have dim memories about the first months of my stay in Kishinev, this was 1946 already. I was looking for a place to live, and an old woman, Russian or Moldovan, offered me a place to stay. She had a dark dirty room that looked like a shed. I slept on an old box. It's scary to recall this life. I was admitted to the extramural department of the French language at Kishinev University. Since I didn't have a certificate of secondary education, I was supposed to finish the tenth grade via correspondence. After completing my first year at university I went to study in a Moldovan evening school. I also went to work. I got a job as an assistant accountant at the buttery. There I met my future husband, Boris Leibovich. He was chief of the raw material department at the buttery. Boris was nine years older than me. He was a nice looking man with somewhat old-fashioned manners that were unusual for me. Boris came from a village.

Boris introduced me to his parents. I was very worried, when I first went to see them. I was ashamed of my more than modest clothing. I had just one pair of stockings. Once I fell on my way from the school in the evening and there was a big hole on one stocking. I was good at sewing and darning, and made a knee-big darn on the stocking. I pulled my skirt down to hide the darn, but Boris' mother saw it anyway. Later she confessed that thanks to this darn I made a very good impression on her. 'I knew at once that you'll make a good housewife,' she said.

My husband's parents came from the village of Kriuleni. His father, Yakov Leibovich, was a grain dealer. They also had a small store where his mother, Esther Leibovich, was the owner. Boris was her fist child. She gave birth to him when she was twenty. They were wealthy people, but when the Soviet power came they were dispossessed of their property. During the war they evacuated to the town of Frunze [today Bishkek] in Kyrgyzia [today Kyrgyzstan]. They kept their belongings and brought their Moldovan carpets back home. There were seven children in the family: three daughters and four sons. They all got secondary education and were very smart. Their mother never forced them to do things.

After the war

When they returned from the evacuation they did what they liked to build their own life. My husband's sister, Anna Barash [nee Leibovich], and her family lived in Pinsk. Mark, the middle brother, also lived there. He was a shop assistant in a textile store. The rest of the family lived in Kishinev. Grigoriy was the only one who graduated from a technical school. He worked as an engineer. Alexandr, the youngest brother, worked as an electrician in the theater. He was married

to a Russian woman. The girls married wealthy Jewish men. Mara's husband's name was Fima [Yefim] Kiselyov, and Clara's husband was Senia Berg. Anna and Clara and their families live in Israel, and Mara, the youngest, lives in America. The brothers of my husband are dead already.

My husband, Boris Leibovich, was the oldest of all the children. He was born in Kriuleni in 1915. After graduating from secondary school he helped his father. During the war Boris wasn't mobilized to the army having short sight of minus 19. He couldn't see without glasses. He was a very gentle and educated man, though his education was different from mine since I grew up in a more intelligent family. I always enjoyed visiting people with him. He could eat beautifully and beautifully courted me. He called me 'kind child' in Yiddish.

When Boris proposed to me, I talked to Bertha Yakovlevna, the aunt of my friend, Zina Veisman. Zina lived with her aunt. Bertha Yakovlevna treated me like her own daughter and even loved me more than Zina. I always asked for her advice. I liked visiting them. They were poor, but Bertha managed to make their home very cozy. She always put starched embroidered place napkins on the table and managed to set the table with such chic that even miserable food looked appetizing and it reminded me of my home and my mother. So, I went to ask for her opinion. Boris was nine years older than me, and I wasn't sure if I loved him. On the other hand, I was alone, had no home, and he was a decent man and he loved me. Bertha told me at once, 'Polina, he will make a wonderful husband; he is so tender with you. You are sure to love him.' She told me a lot and I sort of received a motherly blessing from her.

We got married in 1947. We invited 40 guests to the wedding. We were poor and couldn't afford a big dinner. Therefore, we only served desserts. My husband's cousin sisters made a 'napoleon' cake, strudels with apples and cookies. I didn't even have a white gown. Boris' younger sister, Mara, gave me her white dress for the wedding. My mother-in-law made me a short veil from old laces. We had a Jewish wedding. Boris and I fasted on this day according to the rule. The ceremony was conducted by Epelbaum, a former assistant of Rabbi Cirelson, a well-known and respected man in Kishinev. Cirelson perished on the first days of the war, when a bomb hit his residence.

There was a chuppah in Boris parents' apartment. I remember us walking inside the chuppah. Then we sipped from a wine glass and broke it. Epelbaum issued a ketubbah, marriage contract, and two witnesses signed it. I kept it for a long time, but now I can't remember where I put it. Then we were invited to dinner. My husband and I had strong chicken broth. The rest of the guests had wine and desserts. There wasn't much joy. The guests were my husband's age and older, most of them being his colleagues, they didn't feel like entertaining. They danced a little. My husband's relatives did their best, but I cried a lot thinking about my parents and Shymy, as there were no guests from my side at the wedding. This was a sad day for me. I don't think I danced.

After the wedding we lived with my husband's parents. They had a three-bedroom apartment in a big one-storied building on Stefan Velikiy Street. There were 19 other apartments in the house. Boris' sister, Clara, and her husband lived in one room, Boris' parents lived in another, and we got the third room. The rooms were spacious with 3.5 meter high ceilings and tiled patterned stoves. Our room was the biggest and the most beautiful. The walls were whitewashed and decorated with a color pattern. However, it was almost empty, there wasn't even a table. There was only a wide couch covered with a Moldovan carpet where my husband and I slept. His mother gave us a blanket and bed sheets. Mara also slept on a sofa in this room before she got married and moved

out. Later, we made a back door to the yard and built an annex corridor and a kitchen. It was nice and my son still tells me, ‘Mother, do you remember how nice it was in our apartment on Stefan Velikiy Street?’

My husband’s family was patriarchal. They treated me well. We got together to celebrate holidays and birthdays, but we knew little about one another. I didn’t quite understand this; in my family it was different. They were tight-lipped and weren’t open with one another. I had the warmest relations with my mother-in-law. I even called her mama. She was so kind to me. I can’t find words to say how warm and gentle she was. She was also reserved and tight-lipped, but it always seemed to me that she wasn’t quite happy. I heard from other people that during the evacuation my mother-in-law didn’t talk to my father-in-law for a long time for some reason. I didn’t know any details, but I believe she must have been hurt. My mother-in-law wasn’t so religious, though her husband bought her a seat at the synagogue where she went on Jewish holidays. She didn’t do any work on Sabbath, of course. Like in my parents’ family, they didn’t work on Saturday. I didn’t do any housework on Saturday, but I had to work at school, of course.

After the war there was one synagogue in Kishinev, but neither my husband nor I went there. It was overcrowded on holidays, the building was too small. I stayed outside a little occasionally. We celebrated Jewish holidays. On Pesach we always had matzah, but nobody could conduct the seder. We bought matzah at the synagogue, but in the first years, when it wasn’t so good there, I made matzah at home. It wasn’t kosher since I made it on the same table that I used for everyday cooking, but the main thing was to have matzah on Pesach. I always fasted on Yom Kippur. It was necessary for me. I only stopped fasting recently due to my health condition. On Chanukkah all children in our family were given Chanukkah gelt. My son has grown up, but he still remembers how his father and uncles gave him Chanukkah gelt.

My son was born on 22nd March 1949. This was a great event and a gift on my birthday since I was born on 2nd April. My husband took us home from the maternity hospital on the eve of my birthday and we rode home on a two-wheeled cart since there were hardly any cars in Kishinev then. I held my son, who was wrapped, strongly. On the way my husband told me ceremoniously, ‘You know, I’ve bought a table for your birthday.’ It was an expensive gift at the time. According to the Jewish customs, the mother names her first baby and I named my son Yakov after my father. My husband’s father also was Yakov. He died one year before at the age of 60.

My mother-in-law helped me a lot in the first months after my son was born. She helped me to wash the baby and change diapers. She often took Yasha [affectionate for Yakov] to her room so that I could have a nap. I stayed away from work for three years looking after the baby, but I continued my studies in the evening school. My husband looked after our son and I rushed to school. I didn’t send our son to kindergarten as there weren’t many of them and it was next to impossible to get a child there. Besides, I didn’t feel like leaving my only son in the care of other people. I felt happy to be his mother. When asked what day is the most memorable for me, I always reply, ‘My son’s birth.’

Yasha was a strong boy. Once or twice he had children’s sicknesses. When he turned four, I was already working at the school. I graduated from university, obtained a diploma in French and became a Moldovan teacher at a secondary school. I rushed home from work. Yasha was waiting for me on the porch. He could wait for me for hours. Seeing me at a distance he ran to me

stretching his arms. It felt so good to hold him, so warm and dear he was. Yasha went to the school where I worked not far from where we lived. Frankly speaking, I wanted to have him close. He did well at school. He liked literature and humanities. My life was filled with household care, I liked my work and took little interest in politics, but the policy broke into people's lives.

When in 1952 the notorious Doctors' Plot 20 began, my friend Zina's uncle Veisman was arrested. He was far over sixty and they sentenced him to exile in the North. Zina told me they discovered a photograph where he was with a doctor from Moscow who had been arrested. His wife, Bertha Yakovlevna, whom I loved, lived alone. Once I met her at the market. She said she had no information about her husband. Though my husband and I didn't have much at the time I took all the money I had in my pocket and gave it to her. I wanted to help her at least as much as I could. Anyway, I didn't do any shopping on that day. Later she moved to her son who was also a doctor; he lived somewhere near Moscow. She left a book by Gorky 21 with Zina for me. She wrote on the title sheet, 'To smart and kindhearted Polina from Bertha Veisman.' Her husband perished in exile. The Doctors' Plot was closed after Stalin's [1953] death, but so many innocent people suffered. I didn't care about Stalin's death. I always remembered what Stalin did to my parents before the war. I remember the mourning meetings at school, many people were crying.

My husband and I had a harmonious life. We never raised our voices to one another. This was like it was in his family and in the family of my parents. If he hurt me unintentionally, I would cry all day long, but never showed any signs to him, when he came home from work. I did what I was supposed to do pretending that nothing had happened. He washed himself after work and I set the table. I believe this was a right approach to marital life. Boris' sister, Clara, and her husband sometimes had rows that we could hear and Clara always pointed out to her husband how exemplary our relations were.

Boris worked as chief of the raw material department at the buttery all the time. At that time everybody tried to take advantage of the position he had at work, but my husband was different. He wanted to have a quiet life. We didn't want anything more than we had. When delivering the raw stuff to the buttery, kolkhoz representatives tried to cheat by lying on their trucks to increase the weight by 60-80 kilograms. The receivers of shipments shut their eyes to this receiving their share, but my husband was an honest man and knew his business. He even made an innovative proposal installing a special looking glass on the scales to see whether there was somebody on a truck. His colleagues said, 'I won't have it and nobody else will.'

We went on vacations together. Our favorite place was Odessa. Each year we took a train to Odessa. We used to rent a room near the sea, somewhere like Chernomorka [a village at the seashore near Odessa], or the 16th station of the Bolshoi Fontan [resort area in Odessa], and often in Arkadia [Arkadia is a well-known Odessa beach, a recreation place]. We spent most of the time by the sea. Boris could swim well and he taught our son and they swam far into the sea and I would sit on the shore worrying. In the evening we had walks and went to the Opera Theater. I liked and still like Odessa. We returned to Kishinev with a sun-tan and felt well rested. At times my husband got free vacations at work and went alone since I didn't get a chance. I did renovations at home and I enjoyed painting, buying a rug or a shelf, made new curtains and then sat on the sofa enjoying the results of my work.

Boris loved theater and we never missed the first nights in Kishinev theaters. In Kishinev there was a Russian Theater and the Moldovan Opera and Ballet Theater that later split [1957] to two theaters: a drama and opera, and a ballet theater. My husband and I were good at Russian and Moldovan. We liked opera. In summer, theaters from other towns of the USSR came on tour to Kishinev. We often went to the cinema after work, while our son was in his grandma's care. My husband took no interest in politics. He always thought about work, anyway. He didn't join the Communist Party and was skeptical about the Soviet regime after it dispossessed his parents of their property. However, we subscribed to newspapers and magazines. My husband preferred 'Izvestiya' 22, that wasn't so biased as 'Pravda' [Truth, the main paper of the Communist Party of the USSR]. I subscribed to a few professional magazines. One was 'Foreign language at school.' In 1961 we received a new two-bedroom apartment. This is where I live now. We earned well and had a good life, but we only lived together for 15 years.

My husband died in 1962, at 47, from cancer of the pancreas. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery. My mother-in-law invited a rabbi to recite the Kiddush. She sat shivah, but I had only three days off from work and then I had to go back to work, though I wore mourning clothing. I was 38 years old. I never remarried. My son was 13 and I raised him myself. My son and my job were essential to me. Yasha finished school in 1966. I wished he became a doctor, but in Kishinev, due to the state anti-Semitism, it was difficult for Jews to enter the Medical College. He went to Tyumen in Russia, where they have oil fields. He entered the Tyumen Medical College. However, he studied there for one year and then said he couldn't be a doctor. He couldn't stand blood and couldn't work in the dissection room.

At that time a Higher Engineering Military School opened in Tyumen. Yasha entered it. This was what he had dreamed of since childhood. He only went to the Medical College for my sake. After finishing school he was offered to choose his future job between Khabarovsk, Moscow and central Asia at the mandatory job assignment 23 session. However, a Jewish military could make no career in Moscow, and Central Asia was too different. So he went to Khabarovsk. He didn't return to Kishinev, but he visited me every year.

After my son's departure work became number one in my life. I worked in two schools teaching French in daytime school #7 and Moldovan twice a week in the evening school. I got along well with my students in the evening school. They regarded me as their friend. They shared their problems with me. In our school there was a Moldovan boy. His name was Boldishor. He tried to enter the fifth grade several times, but failed, and he was already 16 or 17 years old. I bumped into him at the entrance to the school before the beginning of an academic year and he complained that they didn't allow him to go to school again. I felt sorry for him and talked to the school director. I asked the director to let him come to my class where I was a class tutor. He appreciated this so much and tried hard to study better and managed to finish the tenth grade.

A few years later I met him at the market on the eve of New Year. He ran to me from a distance shouting, 'Polina!' I turned my head and saw Boldishor. I asked, 'What are you doing here?' He asked me what I was doing there and I told him that I was looking for a calf leg for holodets. He said, 'Stay here, I'll get one for you.' It was hard to buy a calf leg before the New Year, but he brought me one. Then he took my bags and accompanied me home. I asked him on the way, 'How are you doing? I know nothing about you.' He replied, 'I'm doing well. I sell meat here at the market. I'm married, we have a child and I've bought good furniture.' He spoke Moldovan, but then

he switched to Russian: ‘I’m living to my pleasure!’

There was another incident. One of my students, he was 28 or over, fell in love with a young teacher, but she rejected him. Then he came to talk to me and spoke for a while about his love. ‘Polina, only you can help me. Talk to her, please!’ One winter evening he came by and we went to this girl. There was no transportation and there was ice on the ground, but I walked beside the man across the town. What else could I do, when he showed so much trust in me! I don’t remember the name of the girl, but she happened to be a smart girl. My student was rather plain, but kind. She listened to me and we talked for quite a while and the ill-starred guy waited for me outside. My mission was successful. After this discussion I saw them together several times. Perhaps, they worked it out. And there were numerous times like this. My students liked me and I liked them. My former student, Dasha, she is 60, bumped into me once and we found out that we lived in the same district. Since then she’s come by to see me almost every evening.

I also liked working in the daytime school teaching French. I taught them like I had been taught in the gymnasium: ‘Read aloud as much as you can, listen to yourself to master the correct pronunciation.’ When the deputy director visited my lesson, she approached me after the lesson and said, ‘I don’t know French, but seeing that your children raise their hands and answer, you are at the right place.’ Since then she often visited my classes and invited young teachers to learn from me. I liked knitting and watching TV after work, or I read. I also went to the theater and cinema with my friends like I had done with my husband before.

My son got married at the age of 29 in 1978. He was serving in Belogorsk Amur region. He married Valentina Madiarkina, a Russian girl from Belogorsk. Valentina graduated from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the Pedagogical College, but she had such a thin voice that she couldn’t work at a school. She went to work as chief of the Soyuzpechat office, and later she had an administrative job in the district educational department. I didn’t mind her being Russian, no! As soon as I received my son’s letter with a complete description, as they say, I wrote them a whole page of a greeting telegram. I didn’t care about the nationality of my daughter-in-law, but I cared about what kind of person she was. Some time later they visited me. Valentina was worth all the nice words that I wrote in my telegram. She deserved to be my son’s wife. I love her dearly. In 1979 my grandson Andrei was born, and in 1986, my granddaughter Olga. Andrei followed into his father’s footsteps. He graduated from a higher engineering military school in Cheliabinsk and now he is a captain of the Russian army. Olga is a student of the Faculty of Foreign Languages in the Pedagogical College in Blagoveschensk.

In 1979 I turned 55, and I had my documents processed for a pension, but I continued working at the school. However, I had problems with my blood pressure and it was difficult to work as a teacher. I went to work as a deputy director for extracurricular activities at the district house of pioneers. This was easy work and I used to joke, ‘How come I didn’t know about this house of pioneers before?’ I worked there for eleven years. In 1985 my mother-in-law died. She lived as long as 88 years of age and had a sound mind. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery beside my husband.

In 1990 I visited Shymy in Israel. It’s impossible to describe how we met, 52 years after we parted. I can’t find words for it. I can only say that we sat in a restaurant in Rishon Le Ziyon, when they played the tango. Shymy turned to me and said, ‘You will dance, you remember, Poli.’ All I could

dance was the tango, which he had taught me when I was just a girl. And we danced. Shymy showed me around Jerusalem and Israel. I admire this country. It's a pity that the current immigrants hardly resemble the halutzim, with whom my brother arrived in Palestine. In 1995 Shymy visited Kishinev. I was happy, but there was also sadness in my brother's meeting with the town of his youth. We couldn't even go to the graves of our parents; there are no graves. Shymy calls me every week. He is 86 and he doesn't look like himself. He and Pnina are very thin, they don't eat, damn it.

When Gorbachev 24 came to power, I had an impression that things would change and life would improve. He changed the world undoubtedly, but I can't say that our lives have improved, probably, it's even vice versa. Intellects have become miserably poor and they are respectable people, for example, doctors and teachers. I know pensioners who can only afford milk. Once I came to the store to buy food for my cat Murka for four Leus. There was one of these rich men standing beside me and he wanted to pay for me, but I felt hurt, 'No, no, I can afford to pay for this. Don't do it.' I wouldn't have accepted his offer even if I didn't have anything to pay with. I like giving, not taking.

However, perestroika 25 changed the Jewish life in Kishinev, Jews sort of woke up. At first the Sochnut 26 came up. I wasn't fully informed to describe this process completely, but I remember that young people took a big part in it. They arranged Sabbath celebrations, sang Jewish songs and opened a club for young people. When in the early 1990s in Kishinev they began to enroll children into a Jewish school, I went to the director of this school and told him I wanted to work for them. I was eager to work with Jewish children. He offered me to teach Moldovan. They didn't study French, they studied English. I was also involved in the enrollment of the children. It was a secular school, but they also studied Jewish traditions and Hebrew. I worked in this school for about four years. Then the school moved to another building in a distant district of the town and I had to quit. I was 72 already and it was hard for me to commute so far, though we had a school bus to take us to school.

However, I couldn't sit at home and so I went to teach Moldovan in specialized English school #53, near my house. Then there was a conference arranged by either Joint 27, or Sochnut where I met the directress of a Jewish kindergarten. Her children performed a concert for the participants of the conference. She offered me to work for them. When the academic year began I thought, 'I teach Moldovan at school #53, and the Jewish kindergarten isn't far from the school, so why not work there, too?' And I made a decision to teach two hours in the afternoon in the kindergarten, but at the age of 73 I had a hypertension stroke and I had to quit the school and the kindergarten. Later, when I felt better, I went back to the kindergarten and I don't regret it.

I never imagined how interesting it would be to work in the kindergarten. I point at one child calling him a 'teacher.' He sits beside me and begins to ask questions. Other children raise their hands to answer. Then everybody who wants it acts as a teacher. I made this method my practice in the kindergarten recently, though I used it often at school. I didn't think it would work in the kindergarten, but this was a preparatory group, where they could manage it all right. It's becoming hard to work. In the middle of the year I tell Svetlana Mikhailovna that I won't work next year, but she laughs, 'You say each year that this is the end of it.' She is a wonderful person.

Our Hesed 28 Jehuda helps me and other Jews a lot. They are doing a great job since there are many needy pensioners. I also go to the warm house. It's great that we can talk and support each other telling what we remember about Jewish traditions. Some of us study the traditions fundamentally reading modern literature on this subject. We also have common memories of our childhood years in Kishinev, about studying in the gymnasiums. Sometimes young people from the Gilel organization visit the warm house. They have so much energy of the youth. They tell us about the Jewish culture and sing songs. However, it was different in my childhood. There was no propaganda of Judaism as there is nowadays. Jews just observed their traditions, and this was their way of life. They couldn't live otherwise. Now they sort of open the gates for us: some accept it and others don't. I've felt ill lately. My strengths are deserting me. Human life is so short to manage it all. My son and my daughter-in-law invite me to join and live with them. They are concerned about my health, but I don't feel like leaving Kishinev, everything is so familiar here.

Glossary:

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

2 Nikolai's army
Soldier of the tsarist army during the reign of Nicholas I when the draft lasted for 25 years.

3 Cantonist
The cantonists were Jewish children who were conscripted to military institutions in tsarist Russia with the intention that the conditions in which they were placed would force them to adopt Christianity. Enlistment for the cantonist institutions was most rigorously enforced in the first half of the 19th century. It was abolished in 1856 under Alexander II. Compulsory military service for Jews was introduced in 1827. Jews between the age of 12 and 25 could be drafted and those under 18 were placed in the cantonist units. The Jewish communal authorities were obliged to furnish a certain quota of army recruits. The high quota that was demanded, the severe service conditions, and the knowledge that the conscript would not observe Jewish religious laws and would be cut off from his family, made those liable for conscription try to evade it.. Thus, the communal leaders filled the quota from children of the poorest homes.

4 Nicolas II (1868 -1918)
the last Russian emperor from the House of Romanovs (1894 – 1917). After the 1905 Revolution Nicolas II was forced to set up the State Duma (parliament) and carry out land reform in Russia. In March 1917 during the February Revolution Nicolas abdicated the throne. He was shot by the

Bolsheviks in Yekaterinburg together with his family in 1918.

5 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.

6 Froebel Institute

F. W. A. Froebel (1783-1852), German educational theorist, developed the idea of raising children in kindergartens. In Russia the Froebel training institutions functioned from 1872-1917 The three-year training was intended for tutors of children in families and kindergartens.

7 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.

8 Betar

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

9 10th May (Heroes' Day)

national holiday in the Romanian Monarchy. It was to commemorate Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire, granted in 1878 by the Treaty of Berin. As a result of a parliamentary decesion Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was proclaimed King of Romania on 10th May, 1881.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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.

13 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.

14 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.
15 School #: Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

16 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.

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

18 Six-Day-War
The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

19 Yom Kippur War
The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

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

21 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

22 Izvestiya
major daily newspaper in the Soviet Union, published since 1917 and at its peak the circulation exceeded eight million copies. It was mandatory for members of the Communist Party to subscribe to it. All articles published in the Izvestiya were censored by the Party and were considered indisputably true.

23 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.

24 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931)
Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People’s Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party’s control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

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

26 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)
International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million

new immigrants.

27 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

28 Hesed

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