

# Naum Baru

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Kiev

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*I was born 15 January 1926 in the town of Bershad. I was named after my grandfather Nuhim Barats that had died a long time before I was born. My mother Anna Naumovna Baru (nee Barats) was born in the town of Bershad on 16 September 1899. This town belongs to Vinnitsa region nowadays, but at that time it belonged to Kamenets-Podolsk province. Isaak Semyonovich Baru, my father, was born in Olgopol, Vinnitsa region, in November 1897.*

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## My family background

My both grandfathers had died before I was born. My grandmother and especially my mother told me about the life of Nuhim Barats, my grandfather on my mother's side. He was born in 1870s. My grandfather was a merchant selling fabrics, shoes and haberdashery. He was a well-off and respected man. He lived in Odessa (to do his job there) but he often came to Bershad. Nuhim Barats died in 1921 when my mother was 23.

The name of my grandfather's mother was Genendel Barats. I don't know her nee name. She came from the village of Ternovka, Vinnitsa region. My great grandmother Genendel lived longer than her son Nuhim did. She died in Ternovka in 1927. She must have been about 90 years old when she died.

My grandfather Nuhim had a sister and a younger brother. I knew them. His brother's name was Benchik (Bencion) and his sister's name was Rieva. She took her husband's last name: Furman. Rieva was religious. She didn't live with us in Kharkov, but she often came to visit us. She always brought my mother something delicious. I remember Bencion taking me out on my sledges in Monastyrskaya Street in Kharkov, when I was a child. He loved me a lot. Everybody was spoiling me. I also remember Uncle Bencion giving me more money at Hanukkah than he gave to the others *[according to the Jewish tradition all adults had to give some pocket allowances to the*



*children*]. He took much care about our family and me, in particular, because he had a son of my age.

Rachil Barats, Nuhim's wife, nee Dovner, my grandmother on my mother's side, was born in 1877 in Bershad, Vinnitsa region. My grandmother Rukha (Rachil) in 1933 in Kharkov where she was living with her son and she was buried there, too.

My grandmother had two brothers: Gersh Dovner and a younger brother Iosiph Dovner, and three sisters: Bella (Beila), Evgenia (Genia) and Donia, in marriage was Khazanova. Her husband Moisey Khazanov was a successful sugar dealer. All 3 sisters and their brother Gersh lived in Donetsk. Unfortunately, I never met them and have no more information about them.

My grandfather Nuhim and my grandmother Rachil had 3 children: my mother Anna (Hanna), born in 1899, her sister Sarah-Genia, born in 1897, and her brother Joseph (Yuzia) born in 1902. My grandfather Nuhim gave education to his children. Later I will tell you about each of his children.

I remember Bershad of around 1929. I remember a narrow street, my grandmother Rachil and my old great grandmother Haya, her mother. There was a synagogue in Bershad. My grandmother told me that women were not allowed to come inside the synagogue and she came to the synagogue to meet her husband, my grandfather. I was a little boy then and I constantly asked "Where's my Granny?" I loved her so much. As for my mother, she used to spank me, but I must have been about 3 years old.

Shymon Baru, my father's father, born in 1870s, died in 1906 when my father was only 9 years old. My grandfather was involved in commerce in Vinnitsa and Olgopol. I believe he was involved in sugar manufacture that was just beginning to develop. After he died his father (my great grandfather) was taking care of the children: my father and his brothers. Their sisters stayed with their grandmother.

Bluma Baru, my father's mother, nee Zilbermann, was born in 1870 in Vinnitsa region. My grandmother was a housewife and was raising the children. There were 5 of them in the family: 3 sons and 2 daughters. Adel, born in 1890 was the oldest, then came Michael, born in 1894, my father Isaak, born in 1897, and two younger children: daughter Sophia, born in 1900 and their son Emmanuil (Monia), born in 1902.

My grandmother was religious. She went to the synagogue (women were praying on the 2nd floor of the synagogue) on holidays, observed traditions, honored Sabbath and celebrated the Jewish holidays. They spoke Yiddish in the family. After the children grew up, my grandmother went to live with her son Michael in Vinnitsa. He was a widower by that time. Later he got married for the 2nd time and my grandmother went to live with her daughter Adel in Novorossiysk. We visited them twice in Novorossiysk: in 1936 and in 1938. My grandmother Bluma died in Novorossiysk in 1941.

My Grandparents spoke Yiddish in their families. When I was visiting them I heard them speaking Yiddish and I even understood it, but they spoke Russian to me. I learned quite a few words. It went just by itself, although sometimes I had to ask what this or that word meant. My mother only spoke Russian to me. But when my parents wanted to talk about something that I was not supposed to hear they spoke Yiddish.

My both grandmothers were strict. They had many children and they treated me strictly. They were housewives and were both religious, as far as I remember. Both families always celebrated Jewish holidays, although the authorities did not appreciate this at that time. However, there were candles and matsa and all kinds of Jewish dishes. I knew what kosher food was about. I remember my grandmother cooking tsymes. They were buying pumpkins, beans to boil and cook tsymes. I can't remember the recipe in all detail, of course. They baked very delicious gomentash (*this such triangular patty with poppy and nuts*) and the traditional triangle little pies with poppy seed at Purim. I just loved them. As for my mother, I was her only son and she was very strict with me. My father was an atheist, but my mother was religious. After my grandmother Rachil died in 1933 my mother took my grandfather's thales. My mother put it in the farthest spot in the wardrobe where my father never even looked. It was a sacred thing for my mother, but my father wouldn't understand it if he saw her hiding it. He was a convinced atheist. My mother was raised in a religious family and was a believer.

My mother didn't go to the synagogue and didn't have an opportunity to follow the kasruth. We lived in a communal apartment (sharing it with few other families), but my mother always celebrated Jewish holidays at whatever cost. My mother went to the synagogue to get some matsa and kept it a secret from my father. I knew there was a synagogue in Kharkov, but I didn't know exactly where it was. We always had matsa in the house at Pesah. My father ate it, too. My mother always cleaned the apartment thoroughly and cooked the traditional Easter food: stuffed fish, chicken clear soup with matsa, made strudel with nuts and raisins. I still remember the taste of this strudel.

There were many Jews in Bershad, as my mother told me. She corresponded with many of them and they even visited us in Kharkov.

Aunt Sarah, my mother's sister, Wainshenker in marriage, finished a school in Odessa (with a gold medal for her successful studies) and Pediatrics Department of Odessa Medical Institute. She was pediatrician in Kiev before and after the war. She knew many famous families, as she was their children's doctor. She started working in Zhytomir and later she and her 2nd husband Daniil Abramovich Wainshenker, a Jew, moved to Kiev. He was a surgeon ophthalmologist. When in the late 1920s Kiev became the capital of Ukraine they moved to Kiev. Many professionals were invited to work in Kiev then. They lived in Kostyolnaya Street. Daniil Abramovich was a famous ophthalmologist. In the late 1920s he was sent to study at the school for ophthalmologists in America. He polished his English there. He was a well-known doctor in Kiev. My aunt even said that he was a member of European Ophthalmologist Association. He worked in a hospital. They didn't have any children and they invited me to spend a summer with them. When the war began Daniil stayed in Kiev. He couldn't leave, as he was working in hospital. He was a man of ideals and he believed that our army was not going to let Germans occupy Kiev. He put me on the train and went back home. Daniil Abramovich was an invalid and he was not to be recruited in the army. He had poliomyelitis when he was a child. He walked with a stick, but he was a strong-willed and energetic man. He went to work in the hospital voluntarily. On 29 September he went to the Babiy Yar [1](#) with all other Jews following the order of the German commandment. He was shot there on 29 September 1941.

Iosif Naumovich Barats, born in 1902, was the youngest child in the family. He studied in Kharkov technological institute and lived in a hostel. Later Iosif worked in the Design House in Kharkov,

located in the central square of the city. Iosif must have been a very talented employee. During the war he worked in Berezniaki, near Sverdlovsk, and then he returned to Kharkov. He got a job offer in Kiev and he moved there.

At one time we lived with him in Kharkov. After my grandmother died in December 1933 he received an apartment and we all moved there. Iosif was 32 and he was not married, so my mother was taking care of him. He got married during the evacuation in Berezniaki, Sverdlovsk. His wife also came from Kharkov, but they met in Berezniaki. He was among the last people to evacuate. We left Kharkov on 9 August 1941 when it was bombed for the 1st time. We were on the train at that moment. Iosif left some time in September when Kiev was occupied already. He changed one train to another until he reached Russia. And there he stayed – In Berezniaki near Sverdlovsk. I guess he could have met some former colleague that offered him a job. Engineers were in demand then. He didn't stay there long. He met Luba and they got married and moved to Alma-Ata. Iosif got a job offer from a construction institute. This was in 1942, the year of the Stalingrad battle. He wasn't recruited to the army, as he had a spinal curvature. He fell when he was a child. He was among the first ones to return to Kharkov after the war. He got a job offer in Kiev and moved there in 1945. He received an apartment in Bolshaya Zhytomirskaya. I visited him there in 1946. He became Chief engineer at GIPROGRAD (State Town Design Institute). They had a lot of design work. Kiev was to be restored after the war. Iosif was a well-known engineer. He often participated at different meetings; sometimes he even was invited to a meeting at the Communist Party Central Committee. He worked a lot all his life. Once he came home to change and sat in an armchair for a second while his wife was preparing his shirt and tie. His heart failed him and he died instantly. This happened in 1956.

My father had two brothers and two sisters. Michael Semyonovich Baru, his older brother, lived in Vinnitsa and was involved in sugar manufacture. His younger brother Emmanuil (Monia) Semyonovich Baru, born in 1902, got educated at the Krasnodar Medical Institute. He lived with his older sister Adel Semyonovna. He worked in the towns of Russia. His last job was in Mytischki and he got married there. Then the war began. He was in medical units on the front and perished in the vicinity of Tula during the defense of Moscow. He was Director of a hospital.

Adel Semyonovna was the oldest in the family, I guess, she was born in 1890 in Vinnitsa region, I don't know the town she was born in. She married Naum Abramovich Averbach, a Jew. He was an eye doctor. They moved to the Caucasus during WWI. They lived in Kutaissi and then in Novorossiysk. My father, my mother and I visited them in 1935 for the first time. Averbach was working as an eye doctor in the polyclinic at the cement factory. He was basically a good doctor and had his own practice. He had a sign with his name on his door and he received patients at home at the weekends, because there were not many eye doctors and there were many people having problems with their sight. I saw the line of people at his door at the weekends. His wife was a housewife. They had two children: daughter Susanna, born in 1912 and son Simon born in 1910. His wife was raising them. Simon wasn't a very good pupil at school. After finishing school they both entered the Polytechnic Institute. Their daughter studied at the Krasnodar Medical Institute. Simon went to Perm and entered Architecture Department at the Construction Institute. He lived in a hostel. After finishing the Institute he returned to the Caucasus and later moved to Kharkov. Kharkov was the capital of Ukraine then. Simon stayed with us for a short period of time and then he rented a room and got married. After the war he moved to Kiev. He worked at a design institute

for some time. I know that he made a design for a secondary school in Kiev. Simon died in 1995.

Adel's daughter was my cousin Susanna Naumovna Averbach. Her name after her husband was Vinarskaya. Her husband David Vinarskiy, a Jew, got educated in the Kharkov Institute of Transport and worked in Rostov and then in Kharkov. He was Deputy Chief of the Northern Caucasus and then South-Western Railroad. Regretfully, their marriage didn't last long. In 1936 David Vinarskiy was arrested as the suspect for theft and shot. In 1950s he was completely rehabilitated. They had a daughter Nelly, born in 1934. Nelly's last name was Averbach, her grandfather's name, as it was not very safe to have the last name of the father, executed as a criminal. She got education at the Kharkov University, married a Czech and moved to Prague with him some time in the early 1960s. Nelly Poblavski is a well-known literature specialist. They have a daughter. Her name is Irena. Irena Poblavska was a famous film producer. She made eight films and quit this job. Her son Dodik, a Czech, studies in a Jewish school in Prague. I know from her letters and from our phone conversations that he speaks fluent Yiddish, English, Czech and Russian.

Aunt Sonia, Vetman by her husband, my father's younger sister, died during the war. She had two sons. One of them (an English teacher) perished on the front in the vicinity of Kiev at the very beginning of the war in 1941. Her second son Boris Vetman, my cousin, (he comes from Kiev), also was at the front. He was severely wounded near Stalingrad and awarded the Order of Glory. He returned to Kiev. He and his wife worked in some shop. Later he studied at the Department of Journalism (I don't remember in what town) and became a journalist. Later he moved to Odessa. In Odessa he was a reporter for the "Selskaya Zhyzn" (Village life) in Odessa and covered the news for Ukraine and Moldavia. He was a recognized journalist in Odessa mass media spheres. He moved to Israel in the late 1970s. There he wrote a book "About the evident, incredible things and something else". He described his life, the surrounding and his meeting famous people. The book was published in 1998.

After Shymon died my father lived with his grandfather in Bershad. I don't remember my great grandfather's name. My father told me that he had strict looks, although he was a kind man and he loved and cared for his orphaned grandchildren. My father studied in cheder. After cheder my father finished a commercial trade school in Balta. In 1918 the civil war began. Around 1920 almost at the end of the civil war he joined the red army. My father was in division 44 of Schors [2](#). He had a diploma issued by the commercial school and he served in the commercial department in the army. He even told us that Schors gave him a horse to ride on his trips. We had a picture of my father sitting on this horse.

After he was dismissed from the army my father returned to Bershad. There he met my mother. I don't know how they met each other, but they got married soon. Both grandmothers were religious and my mother also wanted to have a traditional Jewish wedding with a huppah, However, my father was a red commander and an atheist and he insisted on the plain civil ceremony. After the wedding my father worked in an oil office in Bershad. This was the period of the NEP [3](#). My mother was a housewife. I was born on 15 January 1926. In 1929 the oil office was closed and our family moved to Kharkov. I was 4 years old. In Kharkov my father went to study. We were renting a room. My father worked at the Kharkov metallurgical plant as an accountant and my mother was raising me. After my grandmother Rachil died we moved to my mother's brother Iosif where my grandmother had lived. Iosif was not married and couldn't cope with the housework. He lived in a communal apartment with neighbors in Rymarskaya street. In 1933 (this is the year when my



grandmother Rachil died) I went to school. I don't know whether there was a Jewish school in Kiev then, but the nearest in our neighborhood was a Ukrainian school where I went. I studied in it for two years.

Later Uncle Iosif received two rooms in a communal apartment, as he was in the construction business and was to be provided with a place to live. We all moved there, to Darvin Street. These were two big rooms (25 to 30m<sup>2</sup>). However, we installed partitions in them to make a separate study for my uncle. He was a leading engineer. He received an award for the design of some pier in the Baltic republics. He had numerous professional books in Russian and English and he worked in the big room at nights. I got a separate room as well. They arranged it in the kitchen. And they rebuilt the bathroom into the kitchen for my mother to cook.

## Growing up

I remember the interior of this apartment. There were wardrobes, and the ancient floor mirror that belonged to my grandmother and also her old clothes-box. We were sleeping on some kind of sofas that consisted of a wooden frame, manufactured as ordered by a client and on top there were mattresses with springs. My mother and father tried to bring good books into the house. We had a whole bookcase full of good books. We had classical and modern Soviet literature books. I loved books. Not litter was beside us then making the Jewish writers, expect that were.

There was a Russian school named after Lenin near our house and I went to study there. There were many Jewish children at this school. There were Jewish teachers, too, there was even one. He got arrested before the war. He was our teacher of physics. And all of a sudden he disappeared. Our class tutor was Vera Zvantseva (Russian) and then Sophia – a Jew. I don't remember her last name. She was our Biology teacher. I met her later when I was in the army. I've also met her at the bazaar in Alma-Ata. She was in the evacuation in Alma-Ata and she stayed to work there. There were many Jews, Russian and Ukrainian children in our school. There was no nationality issue and we all were friends. We played volleyball, football and attended various clubs at the Palace of Pioneers. But there was something else that was disturbing – starvation [4](#). There were beggars in the streets that came from the neighboring villages; they came into the houses begging for some food. This famine was not so acutely felt in towns but it still touched upon our family.

My friends were my classmates: Misha Drein, Lucia Polskiy and Nina Kreiter. They were all Jews. I guess, it was a mere coincidence that they were all Jews. By the way, Lucia Polskiy became a famous pianist.

Horrific 1936 began bringing repression and arrests [5](#) that lasted up to the end of 1939. I felt and saw and knew it all. I saw it as it was. We lived in Darvin street. Nika Chervinskiy (we were sitting at the same desk at school with him) lived in the nearby house. Once Nika didn't come to school. The following day before going to school I decided to call on Nika. When I came I saw that their house was a mess and their neighbor told me that Nika's parents were arrested and that Nika was taken away. David Vinarskiy, the husband of my cousin Susanna, was arrested too. Susanna was living with us, as her apartment was taken away by the authorities for the reason of their family being the enemy of the people. Susanna's grandmother took Susanna's daughter to Novosibirsk. Susanna lived with us and worked in a health center somewhere near Kharkov. It was far away from home but that was the only job she could get as a wife of an enemy of the people. She took a

tram and went down all the way and there a horse-driven cart was waiting to take her to this health center.

My father and mother also were scared during these terrible years. I remember that our apartment was on the 1st floor in Darwin street. The windows had shutters on them. Only later I understood why we had those shutters. We got them all of a sudden, although we lived in the center of the city. My father ordered shutters at the factory where he worked. That was because people were peeping into the windows, eavesdropping and were becoming very much afraid of each other. I got up in the morning and heard that some of our neighbor was already missing. The “Black Marias” (black vehicles) were arriving at night to take somebody away.

Darwin street was the House of Officers. The authorities began arresting commanding officers. Kharkov was the capital of Ukraine and there were many military institutions in it. There were many high rank officers. The ranks were different then: kombrig (Russian: brigade commander), komcor (Russian: corps commander). I saw them. My father showed me komcor Dubovoi – he knew him. After Schors died Dubovoy took his division under commandment. Dubovoy lived near our school and we, boys always watched him, a Red army officer, getting into his car to go to work. He was also arrested and shot after.

I went to the food market with my mother as her assistant. I remember this Blagoveschenskiy market in Kharkov. It seemed to me a huge, almost endless row of sellers. They were shouting for their products. The sellers were farmers selling their own products: vegetables, fruit, greenery, milk, cottage cheese and cream. My mother usually bought some vegetables, meat and milk. She couldn't afford to buy more, considering her salary. I usually begged her into buying some sweets, although I don't think there was anything but loll-pops. I also remember the stores that were called Torgsin. My grandmother left my mother few golden rubles when she died. My mother bought me boots made in Leningrad in this Torgsin [6](#) store and she paid these few rubles for them. I was very proud of my shoes. These were my school years and my mother was constantly telling me off for wearing off my shoes like all other boys, because we all played football. But she still took me to the Torgsin because this was the place where one could buy good shoes. My grandmother Rachil also left me a china table set with the coat of arms of the tsar manufactured at the famous Russian china factory named after Kuznetsov. It was only used on holidays: revolutionary, Jewish holidays or birthdays. We didn't have a big family and we celebrated my mother's, my father's, my mother's sisters' and brothers' birthdays and of course, my birthday.

At school we celebrated the revolutionary holidays, went to parades and sang patriotic songs. I went to the theater or Cinema. My father used to bring tickets to the theater and as a rule I went to performances every Sunday. I don't remember Jewish theaters. I also remember that my father and I liked to sing Jewish songs and my mother joined in with our singing. She was still young at that time. However, my father didn't remember a song from beginning to end, he only knew some phrases. We sometimes sang Ukrainian songs that were often on the radio.

I spent my summer and sometimes my winter vacations in Kiev. Aunt Sarah and Uncle Daniil invited me. I saw a refrigerator for the first time in my life at their home. My uncle brought it from America. He also brought a motor cycle from the US, this was also new to us. When I grew up he gave this motor cycle as a gift and I remember how fascinated I was. My aunt and my uncle spoke Russian. Although Aunt Sarah grew up in a religious family, like my mother, she absolutely gave up

following the Jewish religion or traditions. They had friends among cinematographers from Kiev film studio. They often got together at my aunt and uncle's place with their families. I enjoyed listening to their stories about the film making process.

At school I was fond of chess. Also the 1st Palace of Pioneers in Ukraine was built in Kharkov. It was a big structure. We were told that it was a gift given to the children by the Soviet power. There were no extracurricular activities at school and we attended all kinds of clubs at the Palace of Pioneers. I also attended a course of streetcar drivers. I was fond of physics. My teacher of physics told me to take a course of streetcar drivers. She said it would help me to gain a better understanding of streetcar operation principles, why it needs an arch and rails, etc. It was all very interesting to me. I attended this course with my friends Misha Drein and Lyucia Polskiy at first. But later Lyucia took to music classes and Misha went in for boxing. I also liked skating. My friends and I went to the skating rink at the Dynamo stadium.

## **During the War**

I remember well Hitler coming to power and invasion of Poland. My father was a reserve officer and was recruited to the army in 1939 for half a year service term. He worked as an accountant, business manager and lieutenant-technician at a military institution in Kharkov. He was wearing a military uniform. He lived at home, but due to his mobilization to the army he spent a lot of time in service. I hardly ever saw him. He returned home very late. We were actually preparing for the war. Nobody knew how it would start but everybody knew that it was inevitable.

When working at the plant he was leaving home at eight in the morning to return at 10 in the evening. I was already asleep at this time, as far as I had to get up early in the morning to go to school. It was basically my mother that I spent most of my time with.

I knew who Hitler and Mussolini were. We had political information classes at school. I was one of the leading speakers at these classes. I also knew what a ghetto was. They showed anti-fascist films at school. One of them was "Professor Mumlock"<sup>7</sup>. We used to exchange opinions on such subjects in our family. We had a radio receiver CI-25 or CI-225, I can't remember exactly. We listened to the programs and reacted to the subjects very acutely.

I remember 22 June 1941<sup>8</sup>, beginning of the war. I finished the 9th form. My uncle's son Semyon (on my grandfather's side) came to see me. We studied at the same school, only he was one year younger. When the war was declared he ran to me and we went around the city. We even saw a German plane and our anti-aircraft guns shooting. Our whole family got together on this day. We felt patriotic about our country. My father and my cousin Susanna went to the recruitment office just by themselves. Susanna was a surgeon. They received uniforms on 15 June and left somewhere. The military units were formed in Kharkov. My father was sent to a mobile artillery shop at the Lozovaya station near Kharkov. My mother and I visited him several times. I even remember the soldiers' borsch that we had there.

Later evacuation began. My father obtained permission to evacuate his family from the commandant of Kharkov on 9 August 1941. We were taken to the freight yard, and they showed our railcar to us. Each was allowed to have two suitcases at the most. We stayed several days at this station. We got into a bombing on some day in August. This freight yard was bombed. My



mother and her sister Sarah, uncle Bencion's wife, Fania and her son Semyon and I went to Chkalov region. This was an officer's train to take the officers' families away. My uncle Iosif and my mother's uncle Benchik got evacuated at the last moment. We were constantly changing trains heading for Donbass. We all met at Mayachnoye in the vicinity of Chkalov.

At Mayachnoye our family (including my aunt) and few other families got accommodated at the water pump station. However, later we were told that this pump station was a military facility, although it was located far from the town, and that it would be better for us to move out. We had to move to the village from where my mother called her friends and that were evacuated to Omsk and we moved there.

My father was on the front all this time. From Kharkov he moved to Balaklea. A famous artillery plant "Garroz" was located there. It manufactured and assembled mobile artillery shops for maintenance and repair of artillery systems. In September they relocated to Kiev. He became a Party member in the army. He was a technical commissary in the rank of lieutenant. He was promoted to captain. Mobile artillery shop #5 (where my father was in service) moved to the front to support maintenance of various artillery systems. It was following the front repairing artillery to be reused at the front. My father was Chief of the financial sector. They were retreating from Kiev to Voronezh. The army stopped at the Voronezh front was holding the defense line for some time there. In 1943 passed to the offensive.

My mother and I were on our way to Omsk. My mother received a certificate as an officer's wife and received regular allowances from the military office. There were trains to Omsk, but one needed either a ticket or one had to pay to get on the train. We got to the village of Tekulbas in Kazakhstan and then arrived in Omsk. My mother wanted to get to Omsk because the Laitmans, our closest friends, were in the evacuation there. We stayed with them for a few days and then rented a room. I missed one academic year at school. I resumed my studies in the following year. I finished my 10th year of school in the evacuation. My mother was a housewife and we lived on the allowances that we received from the military office for my father's service in the army. There were some Jews in Omsk, but there were more Polish people that were running away from Hitler. We received rationed food packages at the military office (again, for our father's service). Besides, people received bread by cards and could buy milk or cream at the market. There was very little meat. We also ate semolina and potatoes, always potatoes. There were not enough clothes. I was wearing what we had taken with us from home. And I was growing out of all these clothes. The only thing my mother bought me there was a pair of winter boots, because it was extremely cold in Omsk.

In spring 1943 my mother's brother Iosif moved from Berezniaki, Sverdlovsk region, to Alma-Ata and wrote us to join him there. He lived there with his wife and daughter. My mother and her sister Sarah rented a room in Alma-Ata and I stayed in Omsk to finish the academic year at school.

In 1943 I left for Alma-Ata after finishing school. I passed one entrance exam in physics and was admitted to the Alma-Ata metallurgical institute. I lived in the hostel, located at the outskirts of the town. There were six of us in one room. I was the only Jew. We were constantly hungry and were stealing apples. There were beautiful orchards in Alma-Ata. We also made some kind of soup with a little bit of flour and salt. We worked at the bread delivery service. Each of us received a cart with 100 loaves of bread, 1 kilogram each. When bread was hot it weighed more and we had 1 loaf of

bread for ourselves from each delivery of 100 loaves. They weighed this bread at the delivery point and when it was hot it weighed 101 kg. We were given money for this 1 kg loaf and went to the market to buy some sour milk and flour for our soup. Sometimes I visited my aunt Sarah (she was working at the kindergarten) and she gave me a glass of cocoa. My father was sending his certificate to my mother for additional provisions from the military office. And every now and then my mother sold either my father's shirt or her dress at the flea market. The Kazakh people paid more for bed linen. So, we were selling gradually things that we had with us to keep living.

I didn't feel any national segregation at the institute. The Bekkers (two sisters – Jews) were my friends. I paid visits to them. My Uncle Iosif was called to Kiev in January 1944 to work on restoration of the city. He left with his wife and then called my mother and her sister to Kiev. My mother left in March and I stayed to finish my studies.

My mother sent me an invitation form from Kiev (it was necessary to have an official invitation request to return to Kiev). I was going to continue my studies in Kiev. This resulted in my mobilization to the army. I was off the military records while I was a student. But when I came to the Dean's office to get my ticket there was a military registration officer there and he asked me to come to his office. He gave instructions to his secretary to get my documentation package together to enlist me to the army. I argued with him telling him that I was not subject to recruitment to the army as a student. But his argumentation to me was that as far as I was no longer the student of their institute I should go to the army. This happened in September 1944. In two days I was mobilized to the army and sent to Samarkand artillery school. I studied one year and then the school was converted into a tank school. My profession was commanding officer of a tank platoon. Commander of our battalion was lieutenant-colonel Raperman, a Jew. There were other cadets that were Jews: Isaak Pismenniy, Grishka Seriy, and Iosif Tallis.

## **After the War**

My father was in Poland at the time heading towards Germany. My father served in the army of Marshal Konev. Then my father called my mother to Sandomir bridgehead and she followed him as far as Vienna. This was at the end of the war: October 1944 through May 1945. My mother worked as an orderly in the officer's dining room. And my father was Head of financial department of these mobile artillery shops. He remained a professional military until 1947 when he retired. However, he remained in the status of civilian in the Central Group of the Armies. In Austria he worked in Blumau and Baden-Baden, in the vicinity of Vienna. They lived there and were going to return to Kiev.

My father knew that the attitude towards the Jews had changed. But he was a member of the Communist Party and there was no anti-Semitism shown openly at their meetings, etc. He used to tell me then that nothing changed. But things did change. If we take my father as an example – he had orders and medals at the front, besides, he was a participant of the civil war but he left the army in the rank of captain. He was never promoted further on. My father had the Red Star Order, the Order of the Patriotic War and medals "For Combat Merits", "For Vienna", etc. (he was awarded orders for the towns that he had liberated).

My parents returned to Kiev in 1951. My Aunt was living in a two-room apartment in Vladimirska Street. My father received this apartment during the advancement of our army. But later the owner

of this apartment returned and occupied a bigger room. He left the smaller one to my mother. As my mother had left to join my father she left this room for my Aunt. After my parents returned they lived in this apartment until 1963. But my Aunt didn't have a place to live. At that time my Uncle Iosif got a plot of land and began construction of the house, but then he died. My Aunt went to live there and all relatives were helping her to finish the construction.

My mother went to work, and she also participated in the restoration of Kreschatik<sup>9</sup>. My Aunt also took part in these activities. We had a picture of them sitting in special coats and gloves to clean out the ruins and put away the debris.

My tank school moved to the town of Cherchik (the suburb of Tashkent in 1946). The school was reformed and we were to go through medical check up. And all of a sudden, that medical commission did not approve me as fit for military service due to my poor sight. They expelled me from the school in the rank of 1st sergeant. But my sight is still all right. This was the first case of anti-Semitism that I faced. I didn't understand this at that time, of course. They didn't let me quit the school, because the term of service was 7 years at that time. This was in 1947. I was authorized to be kaptenarmus?? at the battalion of cadets. There were 200 cadets in the battalion, and I was to take care of their uniforms, take cadets to the sauna and keep records of all property in the battalion. I was an intelligent guy and the battalion commander made me a document control assistant. I was responsible for all files, reports and other documentation. I only felt sorry that all my former co-students finished the school and became lieutenants and I was still a 1st sergeant.

I met my future wife in Cherchik when I was still a student. In 1947 there was a big parade on Victory Day in Tashkent. They invited cadets and young people from Cherchik to take part in this parade. My distant relative Fiera (she was of the same age with me) lived in Tashkent. She had her birthday on 9 May. She invited me to her birthday party where I met her friend Zhenia Zats. I gave her the address of my school and we wrote letters for some time. Then at some time she came to visit me. That was how we got to know each other. Zhenia finished pharmaceuticals school at the Tashkent Medical Institute. We got married in 1949. She was born in 1927 and both of us had birthdays in January. Zhenia was Jewish, Sheso they was born in the village of Miastkivka, Kryzhopolskiy district, Vinnitsa region, Ukraine. In the early 1930s her parents left for Tashkent running away from the famine. They rented a clay hut in the Old Town. Zhenia's 3 brothers and 2 sisters were born there. Now they live all around the world: in Israel, the US and Germany. Zhenia's father was a driver. But his salary in Tashkent was not enough to make ends meet and he got a job in commerce. Her mother was a housewife. Zhenia's parents sometimes communicated in Yiddish. But their children didn't know Yiddish. They spoke Russian and Uzbek. But they all celebrated Purim, Roshso they Hashanah and Pesah. They ate matsa, but they didn't go to the synagogue. We didn't have a wedding party. It was a civil registration ceremony and Zhenia's mother cooked a family dinner.

I attended a course of officers and received the lieutenant's rank in April 1951. I was also the Battalion Komsomol unit leader and had the privilege to choose the location of my assignment. I selected Kiev regiment. But I was told that there were no vacancies in Kiev. However, later I found out that they sent few people to Kiev. I got an assignment in the town of Bendery, Odessa regiment. How I became the Battalion Komsomol unit leader was as follows. Rybkin, a 1st sergeant arrived at our school from the front. And he was outraged that a platoon was under the command of a Jew. I was blamed of abuse, of ill performance of my duties, etc. None of it was true, but I was

dismissed from my position. But I was immediately elected the Komsomol unit leader. Of course, never again did I speak to that man Rybkin. This was the 1st time when I understood that I was discriminated because I was a Jew, and that they could blame of the things that were not true. In 1952 I went to take a course of political officers in Lvov.

On 1 October 1951 Our son was born. We called him Emmanuil in honor of my father's brother.

I kept in touch with my parents. We often talked on the phone, wrote them letters and spent few days with them during our vacation.

I remember the "Kremlin doctors' case" [10](#). None of our loved ones suffered then, because all doctors in our family were on the front. There were mainly Jewish names in newspapers and on the radio. The authorities were saying that these doctors formed a group that intended to finish with Stalin. (It was a very serious accusation, considering that Stalin was called "the father of all people, the Great leader, etc." and millions believed that he was leading the country to its happy future). This was hard to believe. Everybody knew this was nonsense but people pretended that they believed it. I remember Stalin's death in March 1953. I was studying in Lvov. We were given black armbands and went to the park. There was a stand for speakers there and loud speakers on the posts. We listened to Molotov's speech [11](#) and then Lvov Party and military leaders made speeches. Then we returned to our school. There were no classes on this day. Many people felt the death of Stalin as their own tragedy. We didn't know all truth about what was going on in the country. Later I got to know that they were planning to move Jews from Ukraine and Russia to Birobijan [12](#) and only Stalin's death terminated this process.

I finished my course successfully and wanted to get a job assignment in Kiev. The commission didn't issue me an assignment to Kiev. I was assigned to return to Odessa region, only to a different town - the town of Bolgrad.

Some time later I was transferred to Balta. My wife didn't work. She was raising our son. Of course, we didn't observe any Jewish traditions then. It was out of the question for a Soviet officer and in particular, political officer. Besides, many years of military service made an atheist of me. In Balta we rented an apartment. In 1956 the Hungarian campaign [13](#) began and we were transferred to Bolgrad. We rented an apartment from a Bulgarian woman. Our task was to force the Hungarians to build a happy communist life. We were using military methods. The Hungarians subsided, but they were very much afraid of us and hated us ferociously. The military learn to follow orders. Besides, few generations of people in the Soviet Union learnt to keep in themselves what they were thinking. Many believed in the idea of communism and that all decisions of the Communist Party were right and just. Besides, spreading the idea of communism all over the world was declared to be the course of the Party from the very beginning. This was the time of dictatorship of the Communist Party.

Upon completion of the Hungarian campaign in the late 1960s I insisted on promoting me to the next rank. The higher officials told me that they could promote me to the rank of captain but that would mean that I would end in Vesolyi Kut, a distant village in Ukraine. People called it Paris, as the nearest railroad station was Parizhskaya. It got its name in the 19th century when Empress Yekaterina was granting the military with lands in the vicinity of Odessa after the victory over the Napoleon's army. There were stations called Leipzig, Magdeburg and Paris in this area. I stayed 7 years in "Paris" (except for one year when I attended the course of the highest military officials in

Moscow). From Moscow I returned to "Paris". I served as a tank man for 20 years and then I was given an assignment as a political officer. Then my promotion went easier. In 1951 I was promoted to a lieutenant and in 1964 I became a major, and was a major until 1971. In January 1967 I was assigned to serve in Birobijan. They needed skilled, experienced and reliable officers. By the way, there were many Jewish officers in the Far East. The attitude towards Jews was different. I liked Birobijan. From there I was assigned to go back to Odessa region. I arrived at Birobidjan in the late 1960s. It was a big and bright town. No ruins, no damages caused by the war, like I saw in Ukraine. There was no unemployment due to a number of big plants. Everybody that moved there got a job and an apartment almost immediately. It was the capital of the Jewish autonomous region. People of different nationalities lived there. There were not so many Jews and there was no prominent anti-Semitism. However, there were anti-Semitic demonstrations in everyday life like anywhere else. Not many of the Jews moved there for several reasons: severe climate (minus 30 in winter), winters last almost 9 months, summers are short and hot (up to plus 45). Secondly, manual workers were in big demand (builders, carpenters, etc.), and the Jews had non-manual professions (lawyers, engineers) so they could hardly find a job. Besides, it's always hard to leave a home place that one is used to. There are very few Jewish families left in Birobidjan. Many moved to Israel, USA, etc. This means their life was not so easy in Birobidjan.

So, I got promotions at work to the Corps Headquarters and became a propagandist, but I still had the same rank, although my direct management solicited for my promotions. At that time a good assignment was service in Germany, in the Western Group of Armies. But Jews could not get an assignment in Germany. Anti-Semitism was on the state level. They thought that Jews were to keep quiet where they were. Not all military commanders were anti-Semitic. Many of them valued Jews and understood them but at the same time promotions were delayed more often than not. If they missed the term of next promotion their explanation was something like "You are still young. We'll wait until next year" and then "Get out. You're too old now". I understood that the real reason was my nationality and submitted my retirement letter when I reached 45.

At 46 (military retire after they serve a certain number of years) I arrived in Kiev. I was a young pensioner. It was difficult to find a job. Wherever I came they told me to come again the following day and when I did their answer was they had no more vacancies. How many humiliations I went through. It was practically impossible for a Jew to find a job. Even an experienced professional that I was could hardly hope to find a decent position. I've always suffered due to my nationality. When the others took no effort to get things, I always had to prove that being a Jew didn't make me worse than the others. Where anybody else took things for granted and got what one wanted I had to beg and bow. In 1972 they introduced a military science class in schools all over the country. I was offered a job of a military teacher and I accepted it. I worked at a secondary school from 1974 till 1997. I taught military science and History of the USSR to senior students. I still keep in touch with many of my students. Many of my Jewish students left for Israel or the United States when they grew up. I knew why they were leaving, I because I knew what anti-Semitism was like. And I always wished peace and happiness to every person that was leaving. My school colleagues remember me and offer me to work a little. But it's hard to work at my age.

In Kiev I often visited my parents. My father worked after returning from Austria. He was Senior Auditor at the Consumers' Union. My mother was at home. She had asthma. In 1970 my parents received a room in the communal apartment at the 5-storied apartment building. The authorities



installed a telephone in their apartment, as my father was a veteran of the war. This was the only telephone in their building. Neighbors also used their phone to make phone calls. My father retired at 65, but he continued working 2 months in a year. My mother tried to observe Jewish traditions until the last days of her life. She prayed quietly and lit candles at Sabbath and fasted at yom-Kippur. I always supported my parents. Before we came to Kiev Zhenia had been sending my parents 30 rubles monthly. My mother died in 1980 and my father lived 3 years longer and died in 1983.

My son finished school in 1969 and tried to enter Kiev Polytechnic Institute. He got a 4 at the exam in physics and was not admitted. I helped him to get a job of lab assistant at the plant. Next year he tried again and failed. My wife and I understood that the real reason was his nationality. My son suffered from this failure. My wife took him to Komsomolsk-on-the Amur at the far East. He passed successfully entrance exams to Polytechnic Institute there and finished 3 years of studies in this town when he was sent to the Moscow aviation-technological institute to complete his studies and invited him to come back and lecture at the institute afterwards. He finished the Moscow Institute and was offered to stay as post-graduate student. He came to spend his vacations with us and stayed two weeks. Then he left and we received a call two days later. Emmanuil said that his place was no longer vacant. He was very upset and decided to go back to Komsomolsk-on-the Amur. His former teachers told him they understood what it was all about and promised to help him. The neighboring area was the Jewish autonomous republic and there were many Jewish students and teachers. He went to work there and in a year's time he was offered a job at Leningrad Polytechnic Institute. He took a post-graduate course in Leningrad and later he returned to Komsomolsk-on-the Amur. He got a job as senior lecturer at the Polytechnic Institute. He worked as Dean and then Chief of Department. In 1991 my son decided to leave the Institute. He didn't see any perspective in this small institute. He moved to Khabarovsk and took a course in management. After finishing this course he founded the Priminvest Company and became its General Director. The management of Amursteel plant (metallurgical plant) addressed him with the request to restore their plant back to the operational level. He managed to make this plant profitable within two years. He established contacts with English, Czech and even Australian companies.

When he was a student in Moscow Emmanuil met his future wife. Her name is Lubov Malenboim. She is a Jew. She was born in Slavuta, not far from Kiev. After school Luba entered the Moscow aviation technological institute. They got acquainted there and got married. She is a Scientific Secretary of the Institute in Khabarovsk.

Their children were growing up. Zhenia Baru, the oldest, was born in 1978. His parents gave him my wife's first name. He went to study in Israel (after he finished 9 years of secondary school). My grandson finished school in Israel and came back to Khabarovsk. He got educated at the Khabarovsk Institute of Economy and Law and took a post-graduate course. Ilyusha and Igor, the younger twins, were born on 20 April 1984. They also entered this same Institute of Economy and Law, only they study at different departments. The twins are like two peas in a pod and they decided to choose different departments at the institute to avoid any confusion. Zhenia, the older one, was President of Khabarovsk Jewish Student Organization. The twins also attended all events there when they were still at school. They even took an active part in these activities. Our daughter-in-law told me on the phone that they danced and sang and were awarded prizes. They do not know Yiddish or Hebrew. However, they have a deep knowledge of the traditions of their

people. They like to study the Jewish history. They read a lot about it in Russian. They sometimes bring me books to read. They know traditional food, traditions and holidays. My grandchildren look forward when restoration of the synagogue in Khabarovsk shall be completed. There are not many Jews in Khabarovsk and there is no state anti-Semitism, although there are some expressions of it in everyday life. There is a Jewish community and Hesed in Khabarovsk.

My wife and I celebrated the golden anniversary of our wedding in June 1999. Our son died earlier, on 26 February 1999 after heart surgery. He stayed 3 days in the reanimation ward but the doctors couldn't bring him back to life. He was buried in Khabarovsk. The funeral was in accordance with Jewish traditions. The ritual was performed in an ordinary apartment, something like a meeting house for praying. The children loved him so much and his death was hard to accept.

I am very concerned about what is happening in Israel, because I understand the history of this country and I know the price of freedom of the Jewish people and how much effort they put into building up their life there. I have many acquaintances in Israel, many of those that moved to Israel. I can understand the position of their Prime Minister, although some people may disagree with it. But it is the right of the people to defend their land and their families. I believe that this is Israel's land historically. As for Jerusalem, it is the result of the effort of the people of Israel. I haven't been in Israel, although I would love to visit this country.

Now I know all Jewish holidays and study the history and traditions. Hesed, the Jewish community, supports us. My wife and I often read newspapers and magazines. I am happy to live at the time when my grandson can say with pride "We are Jews!"

## Glossary

**1 Babiy Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the fascists on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev**

**2 Nikolai Alexandrovich Schors (1895-1919), a famous Soviet commander and a Hero of the Civil War**

In 1918-19 he was commanding officer of a unit in Bogunskiy regiment, brigade and of the First Ukrainian and Soviet and 44th Rifle Division fighting against the Petlura and Polish armies. Perished on the battlefield.

**3 NEP - «New Economic Policy» of the Soviet authorities declared by Lenin, when private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by wars and revolution**

**4 Artificial famine in Ukraine in 1920 that took away millions of people**

It was arranged to suppress the protesting peasants that didn't want to join collective farms. 1930-1934 - the years of dreadful forced famine in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from farmers. People were dying in the streets, the whole villages were passing away. The

authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that didn't want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms

#### **5 In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror**

The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Former rivals Zinovyev, Kamenev, and Bukharin admitted to crimes against the state in show trials and were sentenced to death. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed. More than half of the high-ranking army officers were purged between 1936 and 1938.

#### **6 Such shops were created in 1920s to support commerce with foreigners**

One could buy good quality food products and clothing in exchange for gold and antiquities in such shops.

#### **7 A German film made in the 1930s about the life of a Jewish professor in the fascist Germany**

#### **8 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning the fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war**

On this day the Great patriotic War began.

#### **9 Kreschatik is the main street of Kiev**

#### **10 «Doctors' Case» - was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with murdering outstanding Bolsheviks**

The «Case» was started in 1952, but was never finished in March 1953 after Stalin's death.

#### **11 MOLOTOV (Skriabin) Viacheslav Mikhailovich (1890-1986) , a Soviet political leader During the October revolution he was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee**

In 1939-49 & 1953-56 he was Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1921-57. Member of Presidium of the central Committee of the CPSU in 1926-57. He was belonged to the closest political surrounding of I.V. Stalin; one of the most active organizers of repression in the 1930s - early 1950s. He spoke against criticism of the cult of Stalin in mid 1950s.

#### **12 In 1930s Stalin's government established a Jewish autonomous region in Birobijan, in the desert with a terrible climate in the Far East of Russia**

Conditions were unlivable there. There was no water, power supply, houses or transportation. The Soviet government hoped that educated people would populate this area and make it a civilized republic. People were in no hurry to leave their jobs and homes and the comforts of living in towns and move to the middle of nowhere. The Soviet government set the term of forced deportation of all Jews to Birobijan in the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled.

**13 The Soviet army entered Hungary, the campaign was started to suppress freedom and independence of Eastern European countries**