

# Sheina Burdeynaya

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ludmila Grinshpoon

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*Sheina Burdeynaya is a short, fat and sweet lady. She has a nice smile. She tells the story of her life with emotion and animation. She seldom leaves home nowadays - some time ago she fell and injured her knee. Sheina's husband died and she lives alone. Twice a week a woman from Gmilus Hesed comes to help her about the house. She brings her some food products. Sheina reads a lot - she mostly reads classic literature: Tolstoy, Balzac, Hugo. She discusses fondly the latest publications in the Jewish newspapers of Odessa.*



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## **My family background**

My father's father Yankl Baroo was born in the town of Peschanka, Baltskiy district Podolsk province in 1860s. People said he was a very handsome man, but I never saw him. He was a solicitor for private cases in court. He wrote requests to court and spoke on behalf of his clients. He was called schriber - writing clerk' in Yiddish. I think my grandfather was religious, but since he worked in court he couldn't celebrate Shabbat since there was only one day off in the tsarist Russia: Sunday. My grandfather died in Peschanka before I was born in 1922.

The name of my grandmother on my father's side was Sheina Baroo. I don't know her maiden name. I have no information about where she came from. All I know about my grandmother is that she was a housewife. She was religious like all Jews in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Grandmother Sheina died in the early 1900s. After my grandmother died leaving my grandfather with six children two of whom were very small he remarried. His 2nd wife's name was Myndl . She gave birth to a son in 1912. He was named Abram. In early 1930s Myndl followed the older children moving to Rybnitsa. The children moved in search for a job. During the Great Patriotic War Myndl was in the ghetto with us. She was very nice to me.

My father had three brothers and three sisters that were all born in Peschanka. My father's older sister Surah was born in 1889. She was a tall and thin woman. She was a housewife. She lived in Rybnitsa. She married a Jew. I remember only her husband's last name of Gitman. Her older son was chairman of the district Soviet in Rybnitsa. During the Great Patriotic War Surah and her children were in the Baltskoye ghetto. After the war she lived in Rybnitsa, she was a pensioner already, all her children went on to live in Rybnitsa. Surah died in 1960.

My father's older brother Duvid-Leib was born around 1891. In early 1910s he moved to America. He got married in the US a Jewish woman and sent us his photo with his wife. Unfortunately, it was lost. He wrote letters from there I don't know what was his occupation. I remember my father sending him his picture. My father was wearing moustache and Duvid wrote that his moustache was like Hitler's moustache and we hadn't even heard about Hitler. This was in the middle of 1930s. In 1970s we received few letters in English from his children, but we didn't know English and they didn't know Russian and we couldn't correspond.

Uncle Haim was born in 1893. He lived in Peschanka near where grandfather Yankl lived. He owned a haberdashery store. He got married a Jewish woman. The name of their only daughter was Sonia. When NEP was over in early 1930-s all property of the Haim's family was confiscated. Since there was no job in the small town of Peschanka uncle Haim and his family moved to Rybnitsa where he could find a job. At first uncle Haim went to work at the stone deposit sites. Later he worked as shop assistant at a store. His daughter Sonia graduated from the Medical Institute in Odessa. During the Great Patriotic War she was in evacuation with the Institute. Upon graduation after the war she lived in Odessa and worked as physician. Uncle Haim was with us in the ghetto in Rybnitsa. He survived the war, but in 1949 he died in a car accident. His widow moved to Sonia in Odessa.

My father's sister Gitl was born around 1890s. She was married and had four children Mina, Solomon, Yasha and Dora. I don't remember her husband's names, and what did he do. He was a Jew. They lived in Rybnitsa. During the war her husband went to the front. Gitl failed to evacuate and when Rybnitsa was occupied she and children were hiding in a village. In the end of 1941 they returned to Rybnitsa and got into a ghetto. In 1942 Gitl and her children were taken away with a group of Jews. We found out later that they were shot. Gitl's husband perished at the front.

My father's younger sister Myndl was born in early 1900s. She lived in Odessa with her husband, a Jew. I don't remember his first name and occupation. Their last name was Eikilis. She and her husband perished in the ghetto in Odessa in 1941.

My father's stepbrother Abram was born in 1912. After grandfather Yankl died he lived in Rybnitsa with his mother. He was single. Abram was taken to the army in the first days of the Great Patriotic War. We saw him in the retreating troops of the Soviet army. He was captured by Romanians, but he survived and worked as a barber in a hospital. After the liberation he took part in the war with the Japanese in 1945. After the war he lived in Rybnitsa. We never contacted. He died around 1980.

My father Moisey Baroo was born in Peschanka town, Baltskiy district Podolsk region in 1895. He studied at cheder. In 1914 he was recruited to the tsarist army and was at the front. He was shell-shocked and buried under ruins. His bayonet stuck out of the ground showed where he was and he was found. A bullet hit his nose. He told us how badly he was treated in hospital. They threatened

to cut off his nose to make him circumcised on both ends. He had to squeeze the bullet out of his nose himself. There was a lot of blood, but he managed to get rid of the bullet and save his nose. He was a nice and handsome man. He returned from the war with lung and heart problems and did not take part in Civil War.

My mother's father Shmerl Kuchuk was born in Yagorlyk town, Baltskiy district Podolsk province in 1860s. He was of medium height and wore a beard and a hat. He was a very earnest man. Before the revolution of 1917 my grandfather was a merchant. He sold grain, but wasn't too rich. In 1880s he moved to Rybnitsa. After he got married my grandfather bought a Moldavian house with a plot of land at the boundary of the Jewish neighborhood. There was a room, kitchen and a fore room in one half of the house and a so-called 'casa mare' - a big living room and two smaller rooms. Later my grandfather built another house in the yard where he moved with my grandmother. There were two big rooms and a kitchen in that new house. There were mezuzot on all doors. I remember that all members of the family touched them. There was a wardrobe of dark wood in the big room, a settee, a bookcase and a beautiful lamp hanging over the table. My grandfather had a small collection of fiction books in Yiddish. During the flood in 1932 my grandfather's house fell down. There was a big yard and many trees near the house. My grandfather Shmerl was a religious man. He had a tallit and tefillin. He went to synagogue on Saturday and all Jewish holidays. There were 5 synagogues in Rybnitsa [Rybnitsa was a small town and Sheina may be talking about prayer houses] My grandfather went to bes medresh, a small synagogue. There also was a big synagogue of tailors nearby. The rabbi from this synagogue was not a local and had no big authority. He was a Hasid while my grandfather didn't like Hasidim. I remember there was a cheder near where we lived. Melammed taught Torah and Talmud to the boys.

After the revolution of 1917 my grandfather was trying to provide for his family by renting a garden from a landlord. The whole family picked up fruit and dried for sale. Later my grandfather grew tobacco with his younger daughters Vitya and Soibl. They planted tobacco plants and looked after the plantation. I remember how they dried this tobacco in the yard - laying out the leaves under the sun. After it got dried it was sold. In the early 1930s when NEP was over and private entrepreneurship was not allowed my grandfather couldn't earn his living.

It was the period of collectivization and my grandfather went to work at a collective farm. We lived near a Moldavian neighborhood and our Moldavian neighbors were our friends. I was very happy when my grandfather was accepted to the collective farm. I thought there could be no bigger happiness in the world. I attended meetings along with my grandfather. The collective farm was called 'Liberation of Bessarabia'. Only my grandmother felt ashamed of my grandfather working at the collective farm in front of their rich relatives. In the late 1930s my grandfather Shmerl got pleurisy. He was taken to Odessa where he had a surgery, but it didn't help. He died in 1937 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Rybnitsa he was buried in accordance with Jewish customs, his son Srul said kaddish.

My grandmother on my mother's side Freida, nee Gurwitz, was born to a rich family in Rybnitsa in the late 1860s. I know only that my grandmother had few brothers and sister Tsyzia. My grandmother Freida was a very beautiful woman of medium height. She always wore dark clothes and a kerchief even though she had beautiful hair. My grandmother was very religious. She went to the synagogue on holidays. Every Saturday the family got together at the table. My grandmother lit

two candles and my grandfather said a kiddush. He used to sit in an armchair say his prayers drawlingly. All Sabbath food was made on Friday afternoon. She cooked cholent potato kugel, chicken soup. I remember that my grandmother had a special stand with a candle underneath where she put her dishes to keep them warm for Sabbat. On Sabbath and holidays Darunia, a Moldavian woman, came to stoke a stove and do miscellaneous work at home.

My grandmother had a good education for her time: she could pray in Hebrew, speak and read in Yiddish and had fluent Russian. I think she learned it at home. My grandmother went to synagogue, but she and grandfather entered the synagogue through different entrance doors. Men prayed downstairs and women were on the upper tier. At the synagogue many women wanted to stand beside my grandmother Freida since she knew how to pray - very few women knew prayers. On the day of Tisha Be Av. the day of the destruction of the Temple everything from my grandmother's home was removed outside, quite a few women came to her house - they sat on the floor or stood in the yard. My grandmother said prayers and they listened. She told me many stories from the Torah: about Joseph, Jacob, Benjamin and 12 brothers.

My grandmother and grandfather had five sons and a daughter. They were all born in Rybnitsa. My mother was the oldest of the children. I don't know where they studied, but they could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. They read a lot in Yiddish and Russian.

Aunt Feiga was born in 1888. My aunt married her husband for love. According to the tradition the oldest sister was to get married before her younger sister. Aunt Feiga's fiancé looked forward to my mother's marriage. Aunt Feiga was a very beautiful woman. Her husband's last name was Averbuch I don't know his first name. He was a Jew. They got married in 1920 after my parents' wedding. Aunt Feiga had two children: son Shoka and daughter Esther. Her husband died from sarcoma soon after his daughter's birth. Aunt Feiga went to work as cleaning woman at a pharmacy. Later she learned to compose simple medications. My parents supported her. Her son Shoka actually lived with us. Her younger daughter stayed with her. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War her son Shoka studied at the machine building college in Odessa. He was wounded during defense of Odessa and died in hospital. Aunt Feiga and her daughter were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa with us during the war. After the war Esther got married a Jew. She had a daughter. She was an accountant and lived in Rybnitsa. Aunt Feiga lived with her daughter's family. She died in early 1980s. In 1990s Esther and her family moved to Israel.

My mother's brother Srul was born in early 1890s. In 1914 he was recruited to the tsarist army. He served in the guard of storage facilities. He returned to Rybnitsa after the war. He was epileptic. He got married a Jewish women and lived in Odessa befor WWII. He had two children. He was accountant all his life long. During the war uncle Srul evacuated. He died in evacuation. His daughters were at the front. I know that one of them lives in Germany and another one lives somewhere in the Ural, Russia. We have not been in contact for a very long time.

My mother's sister Tsyzia was born in the middle of 1890s. Her husband's last name was Krutianskiy he was a Jew. I don't know the first name. He came from Lithuania. His parents moved to Moldavia during WWI. Her husband's parents were rich people. They lived in Rashkov. Tsyzia and her husband also lived there. Tsyzia's husband owned a wine store. Tsyzia had two children: son Boria and daughter Fira. During the Great Patriotic War Tsyzia's husband was at the front. Tsyzia and her children perished in Rashkov - they were shot by Romanians. Her husband perished at the

front.

My mother's sister Soibl was born in late 1890s. She got married and moved to Odessa with her husband. Her husband's last name was Indman, he was a Jew. I don't know the first name. She had a son - Abram. During the war she stayed in Odessa. Her husband worked at the construction of defense facilities near Odessa and she didn't want to evacuate without him. After the Great Patriotic War we got to know that Soibl and her son were taken to the ghetto. The janitor of their house told us that they came home once - and Abram was all frostbitten. They were taken back to the ghetto and never returned from there. Soibl's husband also perished.

My mother's younger sister Vitia, born in early 1900s got married in late 1930s. Her husband's last name was Tsybulskiy he was a Jew. I don't know the first name.. They lived in Gershunovka village near Rybnitsa. By 1941 their daughter was 3 years old and aunt Vitia was expecting another baby. Her husband was recruited to the army. He got in encirclement and returned home. She had a baby. Her children were killed by Germans. Her husband and grandmother Freida were shot by Germans. Aunt Vitia grew very thin and stopped talking. She only asked for 'broytele' [bread in Yiddish] and cried. She perished in the ghetto in Rybnitsa in 1943.

My mother Manya Kuchuk was born in Rybnitsa in 1887. She was the first child in the family. I don't know where she studied. She could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. My mother was raised religious - she told me many stories from the Torah She kept a kosher household. My mother lived with her parents until she got married. As older daughter my mother helped her mother about the house. She was good at cooking. She was very shy and tactful - she never argued with anyone.

My parents got married in 1919. They met through matchmakers. But I don't know any details about it. My mother's wedding brought lots of recollections at our home. When my parents were standing under the chuppah some gang came to town. There was panic and shooting and one of our relatives was raped. I could guess this from whatever small hints I heard. My parents hid in the house of one of their neighbors that was ill with typhoid. There were lots of feathers and blood around and my parents applied those on their bodies and bandits didn't touch them - they were afraid of typhoid.

After the wedding they settled down in the house that formerly belonged to my grandfather. Grandfather Shmerl and grandmother Freida lived in a new house next to my parents'. We had beautiful furniture: a wardrobe of walnut wood beautifully carved, a table with bentwood legs and a wooden bed with knobs. I had a small room of my own. There was a wooden sofa, a bookstand and a desk in my room. I had a small Persian carpet on the wall. There were stoves stoke with sunflower seed husk that were filled into a special drum.

## **Growing up**

My parents' first baby died. I was born on 24 December 1922 when a 2nd candle was lit at Chanukah. My father named me after his mother. Sheina means 'beautiful' in Yiddish. My parents treated each other very kindly. My father called my mother affectionate names. My father was a soviet official, supply agent at the grain supply agency. He went around the neighboring villages with his assistant to purchase grain. They had mandatory quantities to purchase and their management was very strict about having these quantities followed. Once at Yom Kippur they were

returning from villages on grain loaded carts with music playing and a red flag installed on carts because it was a communist arrangement. Our relatives were at the synagogue when they saw my father riding on a cart with a red flag. It was scandalous. Due to his work my father couldn't follow all Jewish traditions. He often traveled to distant villages and following the kashrut was out of the question, of course. They ate what they had when they traveled. My mother was a housewife. If my father was going on a longer trip my mother and I followed him to help him determine grain humidity and dockage. I remember how we on such a trip we all lived for a while in a former landlord's mansion of a Polish lord. His family had been forced to leave their mansion. It was nice house with white columns and a wide stairway. They had a shed for their carriage in the yard. There was Persian lilac around the house. There was an orchard on the backside of the mansion and a swing in it. On the side there was a cattle yard with cows and horses. The owner of the house was Mr. Zizia,. Later. This was before I went to school. I often saw this mansion in my dreams. Later my father worked in Rybnitsa. When I was small I liked mayeses [fairy tales in Yiddish]. My mother told me about Joseph and Moses and stories from the Bible.

On Friday my mother made cholent and left it in a hot stove to keep it warm until Shabbat. On Shabbat we had a Moldavian aid at home. In cold weather she stoked the stove and did minor chores in the house. My mother made kugel on Shabbat - something like a pudding with noodles, raisins and jam. My mother also made 'essyk-fleysh' [sweet and sour meat with citric acid]. I also make this type of meat. Sometimes our relatives came and we set at the Shabbat- table all together.

Our family celebrated all Jewish holidays. I remember some of them. Pesach was the most important holiday. We had special fancy dishes that were kept on the attic. I had a red glass gleyzele ['little glass' in Yiddish]. with a handle. I got a drop of special wine at Pesach. I remember my grandfather Shmerl gathering khomets before Pesach. Before the holidays he used to put bread and crumbs leftovers on all windowsills to remove them with a goose feather. When this was done khomets was burnt and the house was cleaned up and the sofas were covered with white cloth. Then fancy dishes were brought in and the table was laid down for a fancy meal. We had traditional food: Gefilte fish, chicken broth with matzah, a decanter of special wine and red-sided Moldavian apples. My grandfather conducted Seder sitting in an armchair. I remember asking fir kashes ['the 4 questions' in Yiddish It refers to the 4 questions asked during the seder]. I also remember a song about a sheep and a stick sung at Pesach [the interviewee refers to the song of Hadgadjo, which is at the end of the seder dinner].

I also remember Purim. I had a rattle. My grandfather Shmerl took me to the synagogue. My mother made hamantashen and flodni - nut waffles with honey. They were also triangle in shape. Shavuot was celebrated on the 50th day after Pesach at the end of spring - beginning of summer. We had dairy food: rice boiled in milk, pies and green borsch.

At Yom Kippur we used to roll chicken over our heads - kapores shlogn. Kapores means sacrifice and shlogn means'bea' in Yiddish. At night a shochet and his assistant came to slaughter these chickens. They came with a flashlight. Our relatives got together to watch this process.

Remember my grandfather making sukkah at Sukkot. We had many trees in the yard and he gathered rods for the sukkah. There was a lamp in the sukkah. But I don't remember that I set there.

I also remember Simchat Torah. I went to the synagogue with my grandfather. I remember children carrying red flags and apples. My parents told me about all traditions and holidays in detail. I remember merry celebrations until early 1930s, but in the late 1930s they were not so festive as before. After my grandfather Shmerl died I don't remember any such ceremonious celebrations any more.

I liked going to the market with my mother. Der markt ['market' in Yiddish] was the most important chore with Jewish housewives. We bought chicken - who would imagine a Jewish dinner without chicken. We had chicken for dinner every day. My mother bought chickens alive and took them to the shochet to slaughter. She also bought kosher meat. We rarely had fish, even though we lived on the bank of the Dnestr River. Our main food was chicken and beans. Chicken was cooked in different ways. We also made matzah adding an egg to it. Every week my mother baked bread. We had a stove that was used for cooking and baking.

We spoke Yiddish at home, but we all knew Russian. There were Ukrainian and Moldavian schools in Rybnitsa. My parents wanted me to go to a Ukrainian school to be able to continue my education further on. I had a teacher of Ukrainian before I went to a Ukrainian school in 1930, when I was 8. At that time there was a common statement that children needed to study in their mother tongue. When I was at school, on the fifth day of the first week a Jewish woman came to school. She spoke to us in Yiddish 'Children, I will play Jewish games with you. Those of you that want to speak Yiddish come one step forward'. Many children stepped forward. Next Monday we were told that all children that spoke Yiddish would go to a Jewish school. That was how I got in a Jewish school. At the beginning the school was housed in an old building, but later we moved into a new school building. It was a very good school. During the period of famine in 1932-1933 we got brown bread and tea at the school canteen. I attended a drama club at school where we studied reciting and staged performances. We had parties at school. We often had parties at the former Hasidic synagogue for women that became a club in 1930s. School changed my attitude to observation of Jewish traditions at home since it was a standard Soviet school with the communist ideology only the language of teaching was Yiddish.. I was a young dictator at my home. I am ashamed to think about it now, but once I didn't allow my father to go to the synagogue to order a memorial prayer. Once my father even beat me a little because I didn't allow my grandfather to pray. In 1937 [Great terror] Moisey Yakovlevich Pogorelskiy, director of our school, was arrested and disappeared. His wife Ida Abramovna was my first teacher. His children Rita and Marek finished our school. Later Rita studied at the Medical Institute. Marek was at the front during the Great Patriotic War. In 1937 I as many pupils left our school for a Ukrainian school. We realized it was easier to continue our studies if we finished a Ukrainian school while the high education was in Russian and Ukrainian.

Our family was the wealthiest of all our relatives' families. My father was a state employee and received a good salary. He helped the rest of our relatives. He brought me my favorite pastries from work. I liked to have my sweet treatments at hand. My father had poor health and often went to recreation centers in Odessa . My mother and I went with him in summer. We stayed with our relatives and enjoyed ourselves a lot. We walked in the town and went to the beach. Here, in Rybnitsa, there wasn't much entertainment. However, Jewish and Russian theaters came on tours rather often. They performed at the former Hasidic synagogue that became a club in 1930s. They performed Russian and Jewish classics. Tickets were inexpensive. My friends and I went to see their performances. My parents and I went to the cinema. I also remember construction of a restaurant

in Rybnitsa. It was actually more like a canteen. There was a lime factory, stone mines, sugar factory, confectionary factory and a factory of mineral water in Rybnitsa. I remember the first excavator in the town that was placed in the central square and all people came to look at it. There was Moldavian, Ukrainian and Jewish population in Rybnitsa and there were no national conflicts between them at the time.

My cousin Sonia, my father's brother Haim's daughter, entered a Rabfak at the medical institute in Odessa after finishing lower secondary Jewish school (8 years). She studied there for two years and entered the Medical Institute in Odessa. I also wanted to be a doctor. After finishing the 7th form I went to Odessa with my father, but it turned out that I could enter the Rabfak only after finishing the 8th form at school. I stayed in Odessa and finished the 8th form. I stayed with our relatives, but I felt homesick and returned to Rybnitsa. I finished Ukrainian higher secondary school in Rybnitsa. There was no anti-Semitism before the war. There were Russian and Moldavian pupils at school. I finished school before the Great Patriotic War and took entrance exams to the Medical Institute in Odessa. I failed at the Ukrainian exam. I felt so very unhappy about it as if it were the biggest problem of my life. I returned to Rybnitsa determined to take entrance exams the following year again.

### **During the War**

When the Great Patriotic War began we had to decide what to do. I insisted that we evacuated. Romanian troops had already crossed the Prut River and were approaching Rybnitsa. My father's sister Surah whose son managed to get two horse-driven carts came to pick us up. All our relatives climbed onto these carts. On 3 August 1941 we were captured by occupants on our way. My grandmother had wrapped herself in a piece of cloth. She was religious and wanted to be buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions - in a cerement. On a hot day she put this cloth aside to rest a little. At that time Romanians selected a group of elderly Jews. My grandmother was among them. They were all shot. It happened so that my grandmother didn't have a grave or cerement. On our way we were gradually losing one another - aunt Surah with her children left behind. On 7 August 1941 my parents and I and my mother's sister Feiga and her daughter Esther were in the Krasniye Okna village in Odessa region. All refugees were ordered to get together at the building of the school. When gendarmes came into a classroom where we were they looked at me (I was a pretty girl with a plait) and said they would be back for me. My mother was in panic. I had my hair cut, put on a kerchief and lay beside a man pretending I was his wife. That gendarme came back and demanded that I came out. People began to push me outside fearing for their families. My mother came out with me. She knew Rumanian and began to beg the gendarme to let me free. She kissed his hands and he let me go. At night my mother and I hid in a chicken house in the yard of a Jewish house. The others thought it was a miracle that a gendarme felt sorry for my mother and me and let us go. I realized that the Lord was protecting me. Since that time I use to fast at Yom Kippur. Later all refugees were brought together again. My mother wrapped Esther and me in a blanket and they sat on us to hide us. Romanians demanded gold and girls. People gave them their rings, watches and chains. To protect her daughters a woman that I knew went instead of them to Romanians. She was sent to entertain soldiers. She was in her thirties. After she returned she became weird: she laughed with no reason and behaved strangely. It was the result of a shock.

Later we were told to leave Krasniye Okna and we walked back to Rybnitsa there was our home. Here were five of us: my father, my mother, aunt Feiga and her daughter Esther and I. I was wearing a white dress that I wore at my prom party and a velvet overdress. This was I had left. Rumanians took away all our valuables and clothes. The trip to Rybnitsa took us few weeks. We had no food with us. Sometimes farmers gave us some water. We also stopped at a collective farm on the way. It was harvesting season and we worked there. We got one meal a day - some skilly - soup We stayed there some time and then set on our way to Rybnitsa. There were rumors about mass extermination of Jews. My aunt Feiga went there to find out what the situation was like. She returned and said that we could come home. We left the village for Rybnitsa at dawn. We were lucky to meet no Romanians on our way. We got to our neighborhood. Some houses were ruined. Some other people were living in our house. Our neighbors stood for us and we got our house back. It looked miserable after the flood that happened after we evacuated. My mother and father cleaned as much as they could and installed a stove. We were beggars, but our neighbors supported and helped us.

In autumn a ghetto was formed. Gendarmes watched that we stayed inside. At the end of 1941 an epidemic of typhoid began at the ghetto. We were taken to a disinfection chamber. We had almost all our clothes burnt. Our neighbors gave us some clothes to wear. Inmates of the ghetto were not allowed to leave it, but people from outside could visit us. We wore a white star [so remembers Sheyna] sewn on our clothing. We were allowed two hours to go to the market on market days. Inmates of the ghetto were exchanging their remaining belongings for food. There were raids. Gendarmes captured Jews that were not wearing a star and they never came back. Farmers took their products to the market on a road across the ghetto. They managed to leave some of vegetables to us. We had no flour and we ground corns to make flat cookies or boil it. We heated our premises with whatever we could find: leaves or straw. Esther worked as cleaning woman in a Romanian hospital and brought some wood from there. She and I went secretly in the night to sugar factory to bring coal from the there.

People in the vicinity of Rybnitsa knew and respected my father. Here is what happened in the end of 1941. It was freezing outside. About 100 inmates of the ghetto were taken to a beetroot field in a nearby village to pick up the beetroots that were left in the field. We worked in the field for a whole day and in the evening were taken to the school building. My mother and I were looking for some straw to sleep on it at night when my father called us. What happened was that a woman from that village recognized my father. She ran back home to tell her husband that came and paid a Rumanian guard to take us to his home. These people put us on their stove-bench and gave us warm food from the oven - I can still remember the food: cabbage leaves stuffed with rice and meat, very delicious. We stayed there for some days.

My father's brother Haim was in the ghetto with us. When I got very sad he came to calm me down. He knew how to talk me out of my sadness. I was afraid that we might be told to leave the ghetto while this was the safest place for us. In autumn 1942 all families where there were men over 50 were ordered to come to the central square with their belongings. They were taken away and never returned.

Once I was taken to a Romanian officer's house to cook for him. The day before I worked in the field where I cut my hand. I had it bandaged and said that I couldn't cook. Raissa Tkach, a girl I

knew worked in his house. She spoke in my defense and gendarmes let me go. This was the 2nd time when the Lord saved me. My mother believed that it was better to die than be grabbed by Romanians. She had a bottle with poison that she always kept with her.

There was some order in the ghetto. People said it was a Romanian colonel that kept things orderly. I can't say that he was a kind man, but he never did any harm to us. He talked to us with an interpreter. He formed a crew of younger inmates of the ghetto and always found some job for us to do, or else we might have been executed. There was a park in a former lord's estate in Rybnitsa where we worked for almost 3 years installing fencing or arranging flowerbeds.

My father worked as cleaning man in the ghetto. He got a broom and a bucket and a pass to leave the ghetto. He left the ghetto to clean a section of the road. People gave him food that he brought to my mother and me. Once a farmer gave my father some knitting yarn. I learned to knit from my mother and even got some food in exchange for my knitted things from peasants. Once my father went to the grain supply company where he had worked before the war. They were loading soybeans and gave my father a little. At that moment a gendarme noticed him and my father was taken to gendarmerie. He was brutally beaten and released in 3 days. Poor thing he could hardly get home. He grew weaker every day.

In March 1944 Romanian troops began to retreat. Romanians offered Jews to leave with them and Bessarabian Jews joined them. However, they didn't escape from the Soviet army and many of those Jews that were with Romanians were sent to Siberia. One night Vlasov, and kalmyk units came to town. They were adamantly brutal. They set on fire a jail in Rybnitsa where there were about 200 people shooting those that were trying to get out of it. We went there after liberation and saw those burnt corpses. There were many railcars loaded with shells at the railway station in Rybnitsa. Romanians were blasting them and there was terrible noise that lasted for a day or two. The soviet army entered the town on a warm and sunny day. My friend and I saw a captain riding a horse. One of the officers was a redhead - and it turned out he was Jew. My friend and I told them that we wanted to go to the army. They replied that the army would manage without us and that we had had enough ordeals. My father had suffered too much. He died on the eve of the Tisha BeAv and we hurried to bury him before that day came. We could not observe the Jewish tradition in Ghetto, but we prayed Lord every day to save our lives.

## **After the War**

After liberation I got a job of an accountant in the bank in Rybnitsa. I wanted to go to the Institute, but there were too many veterans of the war entering higher educational institutions. Administration told me that they would admit me, but I would have no bread coupons or stipend at the institute. I couldn't afford. My father was gone and there was nobody to take care of us. I finished a 6-month accounting course in Kishinev [Moldavia]. I finished it successfully and got a certificate giving me the right to work in first-grade banks. I worked at the State Bank headquarters in Kishinev. I was promoted to chief accountant and worked without a higher education.

In 1946 I married Moisey Burdeyniy. We knew each other before the war. My husband was 10 years older than I. He was born in Rybnitsa in 1912. My husband's father owned a small store in Rybnitsa. After the end of NEP his father was deprived of not only his property, but also of his right to vote and his children were not allowed to enter higher educational institutions. My husband's father got

a job of accountant in an office in Rybnitsa and his mother was a housewife. Moisey was very good at technical things. He learned to make crystal receivers. His sister Bronia and he moved to Odessa and bought a room in Uyutnaya Street. Moisey graduated from the Institute of Communications in Odessa. He managed to conceal his origin. Upon graduation he got a job assignment in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy [Russia]. He was a communications engineer. Before the Great Patriotic War he moved to his sister in Podolsk near Moscow. His sister moved there after she got married. He got a job there and in 1941 he went to the front. He spent 40 days in encirclement. When they were liberated many of them were too weak to even walk and had to be transported from that area. He returned to the front and was in Germany on Victory Day.

After the war Moisey came to Rybnitsa to see me while he was in love with me. We had our marriage registered in a civilian registration office and after we got married my husband took me to Odessa. He sold his apartment in Rybnitsa to buy an apartment in Odessa, but there was something wrong about this deal and we had to move out. The owner of the apartment allowed us to install a partial in her 35 square meter room. At that time I worked as an accountant at a construction site. The site manager gave me a worker that installed this partial. We got a small room without even heating. We installed a stove. My mother moved to me in Odessa. In 1947 our son Leo was born. We lived in this room for ten years until I received an apartment in a building built for construction workers in Kamanin Street, 8th station of Bolshoy Fontan.

In winter 1952 during the period of the 'doctors'plot' I faced anti-Semitism. A woman in a food store abused me without any reason telling me that Jews would finally get what they deserved. I felt very hurt. I recalled the war and my father's death.

I cried bitterly when Stalin died. We all were save from death in 1945 by Stalin's Soviet Army. I couldn't imagine life without him. Neither my husband nor I were members of the Party. We didn't go to synagogue, but we celebrated the main Jewish holidays: Pesach, Purim and Rosh Hashanah, at home. We had a festive meal with traditional Jewish food and invited our friends to join us. . We celebrated Soviet and family holidays in a similar way. My mother went to synagogue at Pesach and Yom Kippur. My mother and I fasted on these holidays always remembering brutalities of Romanians during occupation. We also tried to follow the kashrut rules. In summer we usually sent my son to a camp at the seashore. Leo didn't get a regular Jewish education, but he always identified himself as a Jew. My mother taught him Yiddish and told him Biblical stories.

My husband served in the army as an engineer in a regiment until 1955. He was kept in the army since he was a good specialist. He retired in the rank of a major. My husband had nephrolith. He died in 1964 at the age of 52. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery, but Jewish customs were not observed.

In 1965 Leo finished school with a gold medal and entered the Moscow Institute of Applied Physics. He graduated from the Institute with honors. When he was a 3rd year student he began to work at instrument-making design institute. He defended his thesis of Candidate of Sciences and continued to work as director of laboratory. His institute was closed during the period of perestroika and my son went to Italy looking for a job. Later he returned home to Moscow and began to work for a Norwegian company. He designs navigation radars. He lives in Moscow and has a Russian wife. No Jewish traditions are observed in his family. They have two children. My grandson Maxim will finish Mendeleyev Institute this year. He is 22 years old. My granddaughter Ania is 14. She studies at

school. Every summer my grandchildren visit me to spend their vacations at the seashore in Odessa.

In 1966 I got married again. Our marriage was registered at the registration office. I didn't take my husband's last name since I wanted that my son and I had the same last name. My mother died in 1967 after I got married. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery beside my first husband's grave. My husband Moisey Groisman came from Rybnitsa from a poor Jewish family. He was 7 years older than I and I know almost nothing about his parents while they died before we got married. He was a mechanic in transport aviation industry. He was in the army when the Great Patriotic War began. He was a tank man. His tank was burnt near Rostov. He lost his hearing and became an invalid of grade 2. After the war he worked at the aviation plant in Tashkent. In 1950s he moved to Odessa. When I met him he was a mechanic at the butterfly. Moisey loved me dearly and got along well with my son Lyova. We were well-off enough but we had got no dacha and car. He was ill for a long time and died in summer 2002 he was buried in a Jewish cemetery, near my mother. Moisey was buried in accordance with the Jewish tradition. I retired last year. I was Chief accountant at the Medical equipment company for over 20 years.

I am 80 years old. I don't leave my home. I receive food packages from Gemilot Hesed. I also get an allowance as a former ghetto inmate. I read Jewish newspapers Shomrey Shabos and Or Sameach - both are in Russian and watch Jewish programs on TV. I am interested in all events in Israel. I believe that establishment of the state of Israel is the best thing that Jews could expect. Only I wouldn't move there. I saw in the ghetto how Jews could treat their own people. I think Russians then had sometime a better attitude towards Jews than Jews themselves. But I still think it is good to have a Jewish state. It must be strong and not give up to an enemy. If they had been tougher to their enemies there might be no terrorist attacks. Strong people must act strong. Why were there so many victims among us during the war? There were strong guys - couldn't they resist the aggression? I think it was fear, fear of something - even if they were to be killed, if they had resisted they would have at least done something.