

# Efim Finkel

Efim Finkel

Chernovtsy

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Date of interview: November 2002

*Efim Finkel and his second wife Galina Maslakova live in a two-room apartment in a new district in Chernovtsy. Efim was severely wounded WWII. He was giving this interview staying in bed. He has been very ill lately and is confined to bed. Although it's difficult for him to talk he insisted that we met. He wanted his story to be the remembrance of his family that was shot at the very beginning of the war. Efim is a tall slim man with a thin face and a kind smile. One can tell that he is a very kind and soft man. добрый и мягкий человек. Their apartment is modestly furnished, but it is very tidy and cozy. Galina is very fond of room plants of which she has many. Galina takes good care of her husband and keeps a Jewish atmosphere in the house. When I came she was reading a prayer book in Russian and had another one in Hebrew on her desk. She often reads to Efim. They both believe that they were very lucky to meet each other, even though it happened at the end of life. One can feel a warm and loving atmosphere in the family.*



## [My family background](#)

## [Growing up](#)

## [During the War](#)

## [After the War](#)

## [Glossary](#)

### **My family background**

Both my mother's and father's families came from Razdelnaya village, Odessa region, [80 kms from Odessa]. When a part of Russian territories was given to Romania in 1918 <sup>1</sup> Razdelnaya became a village on the very border with Romania. There were about 900 families in Razdelnaya. The majority of the population was Russian and Moldavian. Moldavians lived an isolated life and most of them were farmers: they had vineyards and kept sheep. All residents wore plain clothes. Moldavians looked different wearing sheepskin hats even when it was warm. The Jewish population constituted one third. Jewish families mainly resided in the central part of the village. Few Jewish families were involved in agriculture. They grew wheat for sale and kept livestock. Families of former soldiers of the tsarist army or their children had bigger plots of land. Service in the army lasted 25 years, but after it was over the tsarist government gave them lands and the right to sell

alcohol or a tavern, etc. Other Jewish families owned small stores where they were selling essential goods, but the majority of Jewish population was involved in crafts: shoemakers, harness makers, tinsmiths and blacksmiths. They didn't have big earnings and lived in the central part in villages where they had little land near their houses. This was just sufficient to have a small kitchen garden to grow greeneries and some potatoes. Some families had a small chicken shed in their yard. They bought food products from Russians and Moldavians at the market. However, most families had food products delivered to their homes: dairies, chicken, eggs and vegetables. There was a shochet in Razdelnaya. When the shochet slaughtered a calf or a cow he notified Jewish families in advance to buy meat from him. There were no conflicts of national character. There were no pogroms either [2](#). There was one big two-storied synagogue and cheder beside a Christian church in the central square in Razdelnaya. On Saturday and on holidays Jewish families dressed up and went to the synagogue. They took older children with them. Women prayed on the 2nd floor and men prayed on the 1st floor. There was no established Jewish community in Razdelnaya, but people were helping and supporting one another. Women volunteered to make the rounds of Jewish houses to collect money for a dowry for a poor Jewish girl or for a funeral. Wealthier families supported poor Jews giving them food and clothes on Sabbath and Jewish holidays and inviting them to have a meal in their houses. Lonely old people were also taken care of. This was done from desire to help the less fortunate.

My grandfather on my father's side Lazar – he used this name Finkel was born in 1860s. His Jewish name was Leizer. I don't know anything about his family. My grandmother Etia Finkel was born to a poor family with many children in 1865. My grandmother's father was a craftsman, but all he earned was enough just to make ends meet. Three of my grandmother's brothers moved to the US in 1910s when they were in their teens. They didn't correspond with the family. This is all I know about my grandmother's family. I've never seen any of my grandmother or grandfather's kinship. I don't know how my grandmother and grandfather met. I know that they had a traditional Jewish wedding. My grandfather worked for landlords during sowing and harvesting seasons. During the rest of the year he repaired agricultural tools. My grandmother was a housewife. They lived in a small house made from shell rock, standard construction material of that period in Odessa region. They rented this house with two rooms and a kitchen. They couldn't afford to build a house of their own: land and construction materials were too expensive. Therefore, most of families rented houses. I don't know how much they had to pay for rent. There was a small backyard with a summer kitchen, a shed and a toilet in the far end of the yard. There was no kitchen garden or flower garden near the house, since there was very little space because the houses were closely built. They only had most necessary furniture. Grandfather made some pieces of furniture: stools, wooden beds and shelves. There were two stoves in the house: one in the kitchen and one in a room. They stoked stoves with wood since coal was expensive.

My grandparents spoke Yiddish at home and Russian – to their non-Jewish neighbors. They got along well with their neighbors. On Saturday their neighbors came to their house to help light alamp or stoke the stove. They had six children: three sons and three daughters. Benesh, the oldest, was born in 1888. The next one – Borukh was born in 1890. Then came two daughters: Khona - in 1892 and Reizl - in 1893. In 1896 my father David was born. His younger sister Khaya was born in 1899.

All boys studied at cheder in the synagogue. They went to cheder at 6. They studied Hebrew, Yiddish, Torah and Talmud. Girls had teachers at home from 7. I don't know any details. My grandparents were religious. They went to synagogue on Saturday and Jewish holidays. On weekdays my grandfather prayed at home. My father told me that when grandfather left home for work for a longer time, some days, he took his tallit and tefillin and prayed every morning and evening. When he didn't have an opportunity to come home on Sabbath he joined some Jewish family for celebration. Grandfather wore a kippah at home and a hat to go out. My grandmother wore a kerchief. I don't know whether she had a wig. Both of them wore plain clothes. My grandmother always wore a long skirt and a long-sleeved blouse. My father's parents celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays at home. My grandmother had a bronze candle stand from her parents. She lit candles on Friday evening. My grandmother made challah for Saturday even when they were sold in bakeries. They celebrated all holidays following all rules. At 13 my father had Barmitzva ritual as well as his older brothers. The family fasted at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Children fasted from the age of 5 full day, 'from the evening star to next one'. This is all my father told me about celebrating holidays in his family.

My father didn't tell me much about his childhood. He was very busy at work and didn't like to be distracted.

Boys studied crafts after finishing cheder. When sending their children to study a profession their parents usually took their wishes and desires into consideration. My father's older brother Benesh became an apprentice of a tinsmith. Borukh became an apprentice of a carpenter. My father became an apprentice of a blacksmith. All these craftsmen were Jewish. Jew Moshe Perelman, a tinsmith, lived not far from my grandparents' home. He was a big, tall and strong man. He owned a forge and his two sons were helping him with his work. He always had 2 or 3 apprentices. My father said that he admired his strength and skillfulness and wanted to be like Moshe. My father asked his parents to let him study this profession. My father was an apprentice for two years. His father didn't pay for his studies, but my father didn't receive any payment for his work either. He was provided with meals, though. The blacksmith's wife cooked for all of them and apprentices had meals with Moshe's family. On Saturday the forge was closed. Upon finishing his training my father stayed in the forge as an assistant. Only in four years' time my father began to work independently, they worked parallel. Though he stayed at Moshe's forge since his parents didn't have enough money to open a forge for my father – Moshe paid him for his work. My father worked at Perelman's forge his whole life. He was a skillful blacksmith and had many clients. At that time a blacksmith had to do many things: horseshoe or fix a broken axle in a cart and make all kinds of household things like a door catch or a plough or harrow. After the revolution in 1917 [3](#) the forge was nationalized [4](#). Moshe, the owner of the forge died and my father and Moshe's sons worked there and received wages that were lower than then in the past.

My father's sisters Khona and Reizl got married before the revolution. They married Jewish men, of course that were proposed to them by matchmakers. Khona married Shwartzman, a miller from Belgorod-Dnestrovsky, 50 kms from Razdelnaya and moved to her husband's home. They had two children, Moshe and David. Khona was a housewife. During the Great Patriotic War [5](#) Khona's husband and older son perished at the front. Her younger son was very ill and didn't go to the army. Khona and her younger son perished in summer 1941, during occupation of Belgorod-Dnestrovsky by Germans.

Reizl married a tailor from Belgorod-Dnestrovsky shortly after Khona's marriage. Reizl got some training in sewing before she got married and assisted her husband. They didn't have children of their own and adopted an orphan – son of a distant relative of Reizl's husband. Reizl and her husband loved their adoptive son dearly. During the war Reizl's husband perished at the front. Reizl and their son was shot by fascists. Germans shot many Jews in Belgorod-Dnestrovsky.

All of my father's brothers and sisters, but Haya had traditional Jewish weddings before the revolution of 1917. Haya had a secular wedding in the yard of their house. She invited all her village friends regardless of their nationality.

My father's younger sister Khaya married a Jewish man from poor family from her village after the revolution. I don't remember his name. Haya's husband wasn't religious. Her family didn't observe Jewish traditions. He was an active Komsomol member [6](#), and Komsomol struggled against religion. Komsomol sent him to study in Belgorod-Dnestrovsky and then – at an institute in Odessa. Khaya and her husband lived in Odessa. Khaya finished an accounting school and worked as an accountant at a mechanic plant. Khaya and her husband had two children Aron and Rose.

During the Great Patriotic War Khaya's husband was at the front. He was wounded several times and died shortly after he returned from the war – in 1946. Khaya and her children were in evacuation in the Ural where the plant she worked at was evacuated. Her son was recruited to the army in 1943. Later Khaya received a notification that her son was missing. After the war Khaya and her daughter returned to Odessa. I didn't hear from them since then. Khaya died in 1979.

My father's brothers also got married and had children. Benesh, his wife and their three children emigrated to Palestine in 1920s. My grandparents' family didn't keep in touch with them since it was not safe to correspond with relatives from abroad at that time [7](#). I have no information about them. Borukh, his wife Rakhil, and son Leib, that was a child then, moved to Limanskoye village not far from Razdelnaya. Borukh was a carpenter before the war. During the war he volunteered to the front where he was wounded. His wife and son were in evacuation in the Ural. After the war Borukh returned to Limanskoye, where his wife and son returned from evacuation. He was a mechanic in a tractor crew. He died in Limanskoye in 1970s. I visited them only once after the war after I demobilized from the army. I never saw them again and all I know about their life is what they described in their brief letters.

My father's brothers and sisters were enthusiastic about the revolution of 1917. They came from a poor family and believed that they would have a better life in a communist country. After leaving their parents' home they stopped observing most Jewish traditions. But they kept celebrating Jewish holidays as tribute to the old rules. I know very little about their life before I was born and my father didn't tell me much.

My grandfather died in 1931. He was buried in accordance with the Jewish customs. My father read a kadesh on his grave. My father couldn't observe the mourning for 7 days since he had to go to work. Only my grandmother could perform this requirement. My grandmother was shot by Germans at the very beginning of the war in 1941 when Razdelnaya was occupied by Germans. My mother's parents also lived in Razdelnaya. My grandfather Aron Mishulis was born in 1870s. My grandmother Leya Mishulis was approximately the same age as my grandfather. My grandfather told me that he grew up in the family with many children, but I can remember only his older sister Golda that died of tuberculosis in her teens. My mother was named after her. I don't know any of

my mother's relatives My grandfather Aron was a tailor. My grandmother was a housewife. They had a house. The biggest room in the house was my grandfather's shop. There were 3 more rooms: my grandparents' bedroom and two children's rooms – one for the sons and one of my mother's. There were few fruit trees near the house. They fetched water from a well. I don't remember any details of their life – it was so long ago. My grandparents had three children: their older son Velvl, was born in 1894. During World War I Velvl volunteered to the tsarist army and died of typhoid in hospital in 1915. My mother Golda was born in 1897 and my mother's younger brother Gersh was born in 1899. In 1917 Gersh emigrated to Argentina and we didn't have any more information about him.

My mother's parents spoke Yiddish in the family. They spoke fluent Russian with their non-Jewish neighbors. My mother's parents went to synagogue on Saturday and on Jewish holidays. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My mother's brothers went to cheder and my mother had a teacher at home to teach her to write and read in Yiddish and Hebrew. I know no details. My grandfather trained my mother to sew and she assisted him in his work after she turned 14. After training my mother worked with her father – he cut fabrics and she sewed clothes. My grandfather didn't make much money and the family couldn't afford much, but they had sufficient to make their living. I remember my grandmother and grandfather. My grandfather was a comely man of average height. He had a small well-groomed beard. My grandfather wore a kippah and a casual black hat when going out. My grandmother was a short and rather fat woman. She wore long dark gowns and a shawl. She was a very kind person and loved my brother and me dearly. She always had caramel candy for us in her pocket.

My maternal grandmother and grandfather perished during the German occupation of Razdelnaya. Germans shot them along with other Jews of the town in August 1941.

My parents knew each other since childhood. They were neighbors. My father proposed to my mother in 1916 when he turned 20. He was a blacksmith at that time and could provide for the family. My parents got married in 1917. Their families were religious and my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. My grandfather Aron made a wedding gown for my mother and a black suit for my father. The rabbi conducted the wedding ceremony. My father's family from Belgorod-Dnestrovsky came to the wedding. They had a wedding in summer and there were tables for the party along the street – many Jewish and non-Jewish guests came to greet the newly weds.

After the wedding my parents lived with my mother's parents. Both families gave them some money as a wedding gift and my father bought a small shabby house for this money. My father and his brothers removed this house and built a new one from rock shell. My parents moved to their new house before I was born. I was born on 18 February 1920. My brother Boris which name was he called – Boria, was born in 1922. His Jewish name is Borukh.

## **Growing up**

We lived in our house until the war. There were 3 rooms and a kitchen in the house. My parents had a bedroom and my brother and I shared one room. One room served as a living room where the family got together to celebrate Sabbath and Jewish holidays. This was the biggest room. We had only the most necessary furniture in the house: a table, chairs, wardrobes and cupboards and steel beds. The only books we had were my father's religious ones. There was a stove to heat the rooms. Winters in Odessa are mild and rock shell kept the warmth in the house. There was a well



and a shed in the backyard. My mother had flowers planted around the house. My parents didn't have a kitchen garden or livestock. Razdelnaya was a big village and farmers grew everything necessary that was sold at quite affordable prices at the market. There also was a big market in the neighboring village of Limanskoye. There was fish sold there and my mother always bought fish for Sabbath or other Jewish holidays. There was a shochet in the village and my mother had chickens slaughtered by him.

My mother spoke Yiddish and Russian with us. I was a naughty child and my mother had to punish me every now and then: she would give me a spank or tell me to stand in a corner for misbehavior.. My brother was a quiet and obedient boy. Our father was always busy with his work and mother worked a lot about the house. They couldn't spend much time with us and I often visited my father's parents. My grandparents only spoke Yiddish I liked to spend time with my grandfather Lazar that taught me many things: he told me Biblical stories and about Jewish traditions. Our grandparents often took my brother and me to the synagogue with them. When I turned 5 my grandfather made an arrangement with the rabbi to teach me Torah at home. I stopped my studies with the rabbi when I was 8 years old. My brother didn't study with the rabbi – I don't remember why. My grandfather was very proud of my successes. He appreciated it very much that I asked traditional questions during seder in Hebrew.

I remember the period of struggle against religion [8](#), but that didn't make our parents atheists. They went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays. They didn't always celebrate Sabbath since Saturday was a working day during the Soviet period and there were no exceptions for Jews. Sometimes our father had to stay longer at work on Friday and we waited for him to return to begin celebrating Sabbath. My mother bought challah for Saturday at a Jewish bakery. On Friday morning she started making food to last for two days. She made Gefilte fish and chicken broth with farfelekh: little dough balls. She also cooked cholent with bullhead fish, (a small fish in the Black Sea). Mother put bullheads at the bottom of a ceramic pot, added potatoes, onions and spices and put the pot in the oven where it remained until the next day. When mother took the pot out of the oven on Saturday afternoon the cholent was hot and we could eat fish with its bones since they became very soft. On Friday evening mother covered the table with a white tablecloth. There was challah bread and a silver saltcellar on the table. My mother put on a fancy dress and a shawl. We said a prayer in Yiddish. Mother lit candles and we prayed for health and wealth of our relatives. On death anniversary of our relatives we also said a remembrance prayer. After the prayer we pronounced 'Sabbath Shalom!' dipped a piece of challah in salt and ate it. Then we took to a festive dinner. My father was always so busy that he couldn't afford time to teach us. Our maternal grandfather Lazar taught us things.

We celebrated Jewish holidays. Pesach was the main holiday, of course. We began preparations in advance. Our father brought big bags with matzah from the Jewish bakery. There was a special kosher, wine for Pesach at the synagogue that was brought from Odessa. My mother bought chicken and fish at the market in Limanskoye. There was a woman in Razdelnaya that grew geese for Pesach. She sold geese and geese fat with cracklings. All Jews bought goose fat from her. We liked matzah fried with goose fat. Mother also made delicious flour balls with goose fat. The house was thoroughly cleaned before Pesach. My brother and I were looking for pieces of bread or breadcrumbs walking the house with a candle. Breadcrumbs if found were to be burned. My mother had two boxes with Pesach dishes and tableware and utensils. Everyday dishes and utensils were taken to the attic for the period of Pesach celebration. Mother made Gefilte fish, chicken broth with

matzah and matzah and potato puddings. She also baked strudels, honey cakes and sweet pies. On the first day of Pesach my parents went to synagogue in the morning. My father's parents invited us for dinner in the evening. Grandfather Lazar conducted the seder. I asked him traditional questions in Hebrew that the rabbi taught me. Grandparents kept the front door open for Elijah the Prophet to come in <sup>9</sup>. There was an extra glass of wine on the table for him. My mother sang Jewish songs in Yiddish. She had a very beautiful voice.

Purim was a festive and merry holiday. Young people went from one house to another greeting Jewish families with Purim. Children in Purimspiel costumes made small performances. I didn't participate in any performances. They got some money or treatments in every house. As far as I remember Purim was the only holiday when men could drink as much as they wanted and this wasn't considered a sin. Only at Purim one could see a drunk Jew. People danced, sang and enjoyed themselves. At Purim my mother made hamantashen – triangle pies stuffed with poppy seeds and nuts and hexagonal flat cakes of the David star shape stuffed with jam. It was a tradition to treat friends and acquaintances to sweets. Children ran from house to house with trays with treatments that were called shelakhmones. When I had to take shelakhmones to our relatives I couldn't help picking on them.

At Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we fasted for 24 hours. Children fasted since they reached the age of 5. It wasn't easy for us but we didn't break it. I always remember the sound of shofar at the synagogue.

At Chanukah our mother lit candles. We had a big Chanukah candle stand and our mother lit one candle every day. My brother and I were given some money at Chanukah. I spent this money buying sweets and sunflower seeds.

In 1928 I went to Russian secondary school – there was no Jewish school in Razdelnaya. I stopped my studies with the rabbi. It was a school for boys. There were many Jewish children and few teachers at school. There was no anti-Semitism and no conflicts of national character. We didn't ever care about nationality at that time. I became a pioneer at school. We were proud to wear red neckties and pioneer caps. I believed in communist ideas and bright future of our country.

In 1931 grandfather Lazar died. This was the first time I was at a Jewish funeral. Grandfather was lying on straw in the room. All furniture was taken out of the room. Grandfather was wrapped in white cerement. There was a new ceramic pot broken and broken pieces were placed on grandfather's closed eyes. Before entering the room people took off their shoes. They sat on the floor crying for several days. I don't remember exactly what was happening at the cemetery, but at the egress from the cemetery an attendant poured water on the hands of everyone leaving the cemetery.

In 1935 I finished lower secondary school – 7 years. I went to a mechanic school after finishing secondary school. I had a technical mind and wanted to continue my studies. We studied general subjects like in secondary schools and had professional training. We were trained to operate and repair tractors and combine units. I liked what we were doing. I finished mechanic school in 1938 with honors for successes in my study and was sent to a higher mechanic school in Teplitsa village in about 30 kms from Razdelnaya where I was to study for 3 years and could come home on vacations and holidays.

## During the War

In May 1941 after finishing my 2nd year at school I came home on vacation. My brother studied at the trade school of Odessa mechanic plant after finishing lower secondary school. He lived in a hostel for free since it belonged to the plant in Odessa and was planning to come home for vacation when the Great Patriotic War began.

In the afternoon of 22 June 1941 Razdelnaya was already bombed by German planes. We knew from Molotov's speech on the radio at noon [10](#) that Germany attacked the Soviet Union. We knew about the war in Europe, but it seemed to be so far away from us. The German invasion was a nightmare for us. I cannot understand how it happened that Germany was pulling its troops and armaments to the border of the Soviet Union and nobody paid any attention to this. This couldn't have been completed in one night! The war took us unaware. We didn't know what to do. There was confusion in Razdelnaya on the first days of the war. In few days mobilization began. I received a subpoena from the military registry office. All draftees were sent to Bolgrad in 70 kms from Razdelnaya where military units for the front were formed. Before I joined the army I had only held a rifle few times at military training classes in lower secondary school. We had high patriotic spirit. We were sure that the Soviet army was undefeatable and that the war would soon be over and we would win the victory. Stalin's spirit was with us as a leader and he would lead us to the victory.

My parents stayed in Razdelnaya. There was no organized evacuation. People had to take care of themselves if they wanted to evacuate. My parents, grandfather Aron and grandmother Leya and my grandmother Etia were not going to evacuate. They saw no threat and didn't feel like leaving their homes. They were not young any longer. In few days Germans occupied Razdelnaya, but I didn't know this at the time.

From Bolgrad we moved to the town of Renie near the Romanian border. We arrived there in the morning and at night we participated in combat action. I was in an artillery regiment. I was a loader and learned from others looking how they were doing it. At first I was assistant of loading soldier, but in 2 days I had to load cannons myself since my trainer was killed.

Our artillery regiment was a part of 25 division. We moved from one front to another. Our artillery unit was the first in attacks and infantry followed us. It may sound strange, but I didn't feel any fear during the combat action. It came after it was over when we remembered our comrades that were killed. We lived in ground houses that we made by ourselves. There was a field kitchen that made meals.

I wrote home, but never received answers since field mail was not that reliable. I thought it was because we changed locations so often and field mail services didn't know where we were. I had no information about my brother. After the war I found out that he was mobilized from Odessa and served in infantry on another front.

I was wounded in my arm for the first time near Odessa in 1942. Nurses couldn't evacuate me from the battlefield before it got dark. I lost a lot of blood. I was sent to a hospital in the rear. I had my forearm bone splintered with a bullet. The wound healed in a short time, but I had to stay in hospital until the bone grew together. I corresponded with my fellow comrades and returned to my military unit as soon as I was released from hospital. The injury did not change my attitude, I wasn't more afraid in combats.



I never wanted to join the Communist Party. At the front it was customary to write application to the party before a battle. I avoided it every time. Our political officer asked me why I didn't become member of the Party and I replied that it was a big honor, but that I didn't quite deserve to join the rows of communists. Later he kept asking me just as a formality and left without hearing the answer that he already knew. I never cared about politics and must have contracted my father's negative attitude to the Party. I never faced any anti-Semitism at the front and my combat awards are direct evidence of this statement of mine. People were valued for their human nature at the front and nobody cared about their nationality. Among my front friends there were people of different nationalities, including Jews. Certainly, to observe the Jewish traditions at the front it was impossible, it even in a head did not come. In 1943 I was awarded an Order of the Combat Red Banner for courage Stalingrad [present day Volgograd] battles, I was awarded several medals during the war.

In 1944 there came a turning point in the war and it was clear that we were close to victory. In May 1944 I was wounded on my head. I had injury of my cranium and was taken to a hospital in Tashkent, Middle Asia, 2000 km to the southeast of Odessa. Hospitals for severely wounded patients were located in the rear for safety reasons. I stayed in hospital until January 1945. I was demobilized after such severe injury. The war wasn't over yet, but Odessa region was free from Germans. I decided to go home. I received a pass from the military registry office to go to Odessa. I didn't have to pay any fares as a military. I had to change trains to get to my destination. In March 1945 I came home, but there was nobody there. Our house was occupied by some people whom I didn't know. Our neighbor told me that Germans issued an order for all Jews in Razdelnaya to come to the central square with their documents and clothes. Jewish families were certain that they were going to be accommodated at some place. All Jews were taken out of the village and told to leave their belongings in a heap. Jewish men were ordered to excavate a large pit. They probably understood then that they were making a grave for their families. Later all Jews were shot and thrown into the pit. Some of them were still alive when the pit was backfilled. Our neighbor told me that the soil was stirring for quite a while after the shooting he saw it. There were German guards with guns watching the area and nobody could approach this location. My parents, my mother's parents and my father's mother are buried in this grave. My friends and my dear ones were buried there. I also got to know that my father's sister and her children were shot in Belgorod-Dnestrovsky. Germans exterminated all Jews in towns and villages of Odessa region.

## **After the War**

In few years after the war I began to work on having monuments installed in the areas of mass shooting. I wrote letters to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and to the Supreme Soviet. Most often I received indefinite answers – neither refusal, nor consent. I didn't give up and there was a monument to the Jews exterminated in 1941 installed in Razdelnaya village of Odessa region in the middle of 1960th. There was an official unveiling of the monument, with official speech.

My family was gone and I didn't hear from my brother. We met in 1946. He demobilized at the end of 1945. When my brother heard that our family had perished he took a warrant to Chernovtsy from a military registry office. His fellow comrade lived in this town and convinced my brother and his wife to go there with him. My brother got married before he demobilized from the army. His

wife came from Russia. They met at the front. I have no information about her family. She worked as a shop assistant in Chernovtsy. My brother became a driver at a car pool office. Later he studied at the Road Vehicle Institute by correspondence and worked as production engineer at that same enterprise. He had a son Peter and a daughter, I forgot her name. His son and daughter graduated from institutes and became engineers. In 1990 my brother and his family emigrated to Israel. They like living there. Regretfully, my brother is very ill and needs a wheel chair to move – he has problems with his legs. We write letters occasionally. They have their own families and jobs and live separately.

I couldn't stay in Razdelnaya. I didn't even try to take back our house – I knew that the sad memory of my parents would always be with me. I went to Baku in 2500 kms from Odessa, the capital of Azerbaidjan where my fellow comrade lived. I couldn't find a job in Baku. There were vacancies at oil deposits, but I couldn't work there due to the injury of my cranium. I celebrated Victory Day on 9 May 1945 in Baku. This was the biggest holiday in my life. People laughed and cried, hugged and greeted each other. It was a happy sunny day. It seemed everything bad was behind us and there was nothing worse ahead of us. After Baku I went to Frunze in Middle Asia. I found the climate good and hoped to have more opportunities there. I didn't like it there and returned to Vinnitsa in Ukraine. I went to work as a mechanic at a car pool.

I met my future wife Olga Poliakova in Vinnitsa when visiting my acquaintances. We got married soon. She was Russian. Olga was born in Vinnitsa in 1916. Her parents were farmers. Olga finished Pedagogical Institute before the war. She worked as a primary school teacher. Teacher at primary school teaches all subjects but music and physical culture. During the war she was in evacuation in the Ural. Her parents died in evacuation. We had a civil ceremony and Olga took a double name of Poliakova-Finkel. In 1947 our only son Oleg was born.

In 1948 my brother wrote me that there was a vacancy at a car pool enterprise in Chernovtsy. I asked a job assignment to work there and got it. We moved to Chernovtsy and I worked at the enterprise for 25 years before I retired. After we moved we lived with my brother and his wife in their small 2-room apartment. We stayed in one room and my brother and his wife lived in another. At leisure time we went to the cinema and theatre. My brother and I went to the Jewish theater. Sometimes our friends came to visit us. In a year I received an apartment from the enterprise where I worked. My wife got a job at primary school.

I liked Chernovtsy and its spiritual and cultural atmosphere. Jews had constituted half of population of Chernovtsy before the Great Patriotic War. I was told that there was a Jewish ghetto in the town during the war. Even after the war people that went through the horrors of the ghetto spoke Yiddish in the streets, went to synagogues and sent their children to the Jewish school. They were not afraid of showing their Jewish identity and found sympathy and understanding with people of other nationalities. Residents of Chernovtsy dressed in a nice fashionable manner. Men wore kippah at the synagogue only. After the war there was one synagogue in Chernovtsy. There was a Jewish theater in the town attended by Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals. There were no signs of anti-Semitism that was already felt in central parts of Ukraine.

Unfortunately, I didn't keep any Jewish way of life after I married a Russian woman that was also a convinced atheist. At first I attended the synagogue in Chernovtsy to have Kaddish said after my family, but gradually I began to get adjusted to my wife's way of life. Jewish traditions were out of

the question in our family. I am not a fighter, unfortunately. It was easier for me to give in than insist on my own ideas. I became a nobody – neither Jew nor Russian. Olga didn't celebrate any religious holidays. Christian holidays were as far from her as Jewish. She was a typical Soviet person that was raised an atheist and I became like her. My brother didn't keep any Jewish traditions. I don't know whether it had to do with his wife or it was just the spirit of the time.

In 1948 struggle against cosmopolites [11](#) began. The Jewish school and theater were closed. All synagogues but one were closed. There were articles against cosmopolitans – traitors of their Motherland, published in newspapers. Many renowned Jews had pseudonyms and newspapers published their real Jewish names. There were anti-Semitic demonstrations in the streets in Chernovtsy - no, but there were newspaper publications about other places. and accusations that Jews wanted the downfall of the USSR and betrayed their Motherland and its ideals. Such things were said by those that moved to Chernovtsy after the war since native population was sympathetic with us. This was a fearful situation – the country that had suffered from fascism so hard came to fascist slogans said by its citizens. I was a worker and a very skilled one and this situation had no impact on me, but I thought that this was a preliminary stage before something much worse began – like an artillery preparation.

The 'doctors' plot '[12](#) at the beginning of 1953 proved my concerns to be true. It was directly said that Jews wanted to poison Stalin. Patients in clinics refused to accept medical services from Jewish doctors. I felt accumulating hatred to Jews with my skin. Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 put an end to it. People were overwhelmed by a mass psychosis. They were crying and grieving after Stalin and called themselves orphaned. They couldn't imagine life without Stalin. By that time my attitude towards Stalin changed. I understood that the war was so long and blood shedding because Stalin had exterminated so many military commanders in camps before the war and that we were duped by the Stalin's propaganda convincing us that we were unconquerable. I had many other suspicions. XX Party Congress [13](#) changed my doubts into certainty. I believed that if Party leaders began to tell the truth from their high stand life might change to better. It took me few years to realize that I was wrong again. However, it seemed to me that anti-Semitism reduced in those years.

We led a quiet life watching TV in the evenings. We bought our first TV in the 1960's. We only communicated with my brother's family and our colleagues. It was not often. We invited them to our house or went to visit them. We celebrated birthdays in the family. My wife made a dinner and we had guests. We had a good time talking and singing Soviet songs. We didn't celebrate Soviet or religious holidays at home and didn't travel on vacations. We didn't earn much and when we could buy our son a vacation in a pioneer camp we were quite happy.

I think anti-Semitism grew stronger during the period when Jews began to move to Israel in 1967. Jews could hear people saying 'Go to your Israel' without any reason. It was a problem to enter a higher educational institution or find a job.

I didn't think about emigration then, though I felt jealous about other families that were going there. At the beginning my wife took no interest in moving to another country. She was afraid of any changes and hardships of different life in another country. We were not wealthy, but we had everything we needed.

After perestroika began in 1980s our life became a lot worse, almost unbearable. Perestroika brought many positive changes: we understood that we could talk freely about what we were afraid even to think about – repression during the Stalin’s time, extermination of Jews and a lot more. There were books published and performances staged in theaters. Jewish life and culture were restored, but there were negative things, too. It became easier for young people to improve their life, but older people became impoverished. We were thinking of emigration in 1980s, but my wife became ill and we had to give up this idea. I didn’t feel strong enough to start life from anew. Besides, we didn’t have enough money to pay all expenses. And we stayed here.

I do not get along with my son. My wife decided that he would have his nationality written as Russian. She convinced me that in this way he would avoid many problems that Jews usually have. I agreed, but when my son grew older he began to demonstrate with his aloof attitude towards me, pretending that we were different people and that he only had his mother to rely on. I am afraid of saying this, but it seems to me he was ashamed of his Jewish father. Oleg had his mother’s last name: Poliakov. He finished a power college in Chernovtsy and went to work at the municipal power supply agency. When he began to work he married a Russian woman and went to live with her. He worked near our house, but he never dropped by when I was at home. I can remember only once that he came when I was here. He didn’t have hot water at home and came to take a bath.

In 1982 my granddaughter Elena was born. I was willing to spend more time with my granddaughter. My daughter-in-law brought her sometimes and called us every now and then. When Elena grew a little older she used to visit us. A couple of years ago when my son decided to go to Germany he took my last name and became a Jew in his documents. I do not understand Jews that move to Germany when Germans wanted to exterminate all Jews a short time ago, but I am afraid my son doesn’t think about it. He doesn’t care about the morals. All he wants is to have things to his benefit and easy life. My granddaughter didn’t want to go with her parents. She stayed in Chernovtsy. She will graduate from the university this year. I get along well with my granddaughter. She is not ashamed of having a Jewish grandfather.

I retired in 1983 when I reached the age of retirement. I was an invalid after my cranial injury and it was hard for me to work. My wife fell ill and was confined to bed. I looked after her. Olga died in 1991.

In 1992 when a Jewish community was established in Chernovtsy I met my second wife there. Galina Maslakova is Russian. She is very different from my first wife. She had a hard childhood. She was born in Ivanovo, an old Russian town, in 1936. Galina doesn’t remember her father. He went to the front in 1941 and perished at the very beginning of the war. Galina’s mother couldn’t provide for her daughter and gave the girl to a children’s home. After Galina finished a lower secondary school Galina’s grandmother on her father’s side took her to live with her. Galina didn’t have an opportunity to continue her studies. She went to Donbass where she worked at a construction site and lived in a hostel. From there she moved to Chernovtsy. She worked and studied at the housing services college in the evening. Galina got married in Chernovtsy. Her first husband Anchil Plunt was a Jew from Bukovina. He was 20 years older than Galina. They lived together for over 30 years. Her husband was very religious and observed all traditions. After they got married Galina learned all rules of the Jewish way of life and followed them willingly. She speaks fluent Yiddish. Galina’s husband died in 1970s, but Galina continued to observe Jewish traditions. She celebrated Jewish holidays and Sabbath and studied Hebrew in Hesed. We got married in 1993. Thanks to Galina I

returned to the Jewish way of life. We attend clubs and meetings and celebrations of Sabbath in Hesed. I am a member of the club of veterans of the Great Patriotic War in Hesed. We celebrate Jewish holidays at home. At Pesach Galina makes traditional Jewish food. She has special kitchen utensils for Pesach. Galina follows the kashrut. She and I fast at Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. When I was able to walk we used to celebrate Sabbath and Jewish holidays in Hesed and went to synagogue, but that's not possible now. My wife and I often talk Yiddish, although I am more used to speaking Russian. Galina is a very kind and nice person. She takes care of me and I don't feel old with her. We live in Galina's apartment. I gave my apartment to my granddaughter. I hope she will get married soon and I will see my great grandchild. Hesed provides assistance to us. We receive food packages and medications and I have a doctor available at Hesed. My life is coming to an end and assistance from Hesed and my wife's love and care make my life easier and nicer.

## **Glossary**

**1** During the Civil War in 1918-1920 there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

## **2 22 June 1941 - memorable day for all Soviet people**

It was the first day of the great Patriotic War when the Germans crossed the border of their country bringing the war to its terrain. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.

## **3 In early October 1917, Lenin convinced the Bolshevik Party to form an immediate insurrection against the Provisional Government**

The Bolshevik leaders felt it was of the utmost importance to act quickly while they had the momentum to do so. The armed workers known as Red Guards and the other revolutionary groups moved on the night of Nov. 6-7 under the orders of the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. These forces seized post and telegraph offices, electric works, railroad stations, and the state bank. Once the shot rang out from the Battleship Aurora, the thousands of people in the Red Guard stormed the Winter Palace. The Provisional Government had officially fallen to the Bolshevik regime. Once the word came to the rest of the people that the Winter Palace had been taken, people from all over rose and filled it. V. I. Lenin, the leader of the Bolsheviks, announced his attempt to construct the socialist order in Russia. This new government made up of Soviets, and led by the Bolsheviks. By early November, there was little doubt that the proletariats backed the Bolshevik motto: 'All power to the soviets!'

## **4 Nationalization**



confiscation of private businesses or property after the revolution of 1917 in Russia.

## **5 22 June 1941 - memorable day for all Soviet people**

It was the first day of the great Patriotic War when the Germans crossed the border of their country bringing the war to its terrain. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.

## **6 Communist youth political organization created in 1918**

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

## **7 The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his relatives abroad and charge him with espionage, send to concentration camp or even sentence to death**

## **8 Struggle against religion**

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

## **9 According to the Jewish legend the prophet Elijah visits every home on the first day of Pesach and drinks from the cup that has been poured for him**

He is invisible but he can see everything in the house. The door is kept open for the prophet to come in and honor the holiday with his presence.

## **10 Molotov, V**

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

## **11 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of

the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The antisemitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **12 The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials**

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

## **13 At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership**