

# Evgenia Gendler

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Uzhhorod

Ukraine

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Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya



*Evgenia Gendler lives in a two-room apartment in a 5-storied building built in 1970s in a new district in Uzhhorod. Evgenia is a slim woman of average height. She doesn't look like her age. She has elegant clothes that she makes herself. Sewing is her hobby. Evgenia has dark hair with slight streaks of gray and wears slight make up. She has a small apartment and furniture bought in the 1970s. She keeps her apartment very neat. There are photographs of her husband and children on the walls. Evgenia is very friendly and hospitable.*

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### **My family background**

I didn't know my father's parents. They lived in the outskirts of St. Petersburg – I don't know exactly the place. My grandfather's name was Motl Yacub, but I don't know my grandmother's name. My grandfather and grandmother were born in 1870s. My grandfather was a craftsman and my grandmother was a housewife. My father told me almost nothing about his childhood. He was a taciturn man. My father's parents were religious. They spoke Yiddish, observed Jewish traditions and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Grandfather and his sons went to synagogue on Saturday and Jewish holidays and grandmother went to synagogue only on holidays. They were not wealthy. They had three children. The oldest daughter Chava was born in 1893. My father Arl-Itzhok was born in 1896. My father's younger brother Vladimir was born in 1898. His Jewish name was Velvl. My father and his younger brother studied at cheder. I don't know whether they studied in secondary school too. Chava and Vladimir had the last name of Yacub and my father's surname was Krut. My grandfather's distant relatives adopted my father to enable him get a release from

military service since young men that were the only children in their families were not subject to service in the army. When my father turned 14 he became an apprentice of a roofer. He finished a three-year training before he became a professional. He worked in his tutor's crew.

My grandfather and grandmother died during the revolution of 1917<sup>1</sup>. I don't know whether they died from hunger or typhoid that swept over Russia. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery in St. Petersburg. Chava got married. She was a housewife. Chava and her husband had two children. Chava's husband died in late 1930s. She went to work as a laborer in a shop. During the Great Patriotic War <sup>2</sup> Chava and her children stayed in the Leningrad blockade <sup>3</sup>. During the blockade they managed to escape from the city via the 'Road of Life' <sup>4</sup>. They were evacuated to Central Asia where they stayed until the end of the war. Afterwards Chava returned to Leningrad where she died in the 1950s.

My father's brother Vladimir also had a family. His wife's name was Manya [short for Maria]. They had two daughters: Ania and Luba. I don't remember what Vladimir did to earn his living. During the Great Patriotic War he was at the front and his family was in evacuation. After the war Vladimir and his family returned to Leningrad. Vladimir was severely wounded at the front. This wound led to his death in early 1950s.

My mother's family lived in Riga, the capital of Latvia. I have never been to that city and can't remember anything of what my mother told me about it. My paternal grandfather Marcus Ioffe was born in Latvia in 1870s, but I don't know exactly the place of his birth. I don't have any information about my grandfather's family or his life. I don't even know how he looked since we had no pictures of him. My grandmother Enta was the same age with my grandfather. My grandmother came from the family that had many children, but I've never seen any of her relatives. I knew that some relatives of my grandmother's moved to the US in early 1900s but this is all the information I have about them. Beginning from 1920s one could even get arrested for having relatives abroad <sup>5</sup>. The families didn't correspond and members of our family didn't even dare to mention their names. My grandfather was a businessman and my grandmother was a housewife. There were three daughters in the family. The oldest Genia was born in 1894. My mother Chesl was born in 1896. Later, when we went to live in Novosokolniki she began to be called with the Russian name of Serafima [common name] <sup>6</sup>. My mother's younger sister Sima was born in 1900. My mother's family wasn't wealthy, but they had enough to go on. They were a religious family. It's hard to say how often they went to synagogue, but I know they celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home and followed kashrut. Their daughters got Jewish education at home. Then they studied in a Russian lower secondary school. They finished it before the revolution in 1917. After the revolution they didn't continue their education. At my mother's parents' home they spoke Yiddish and Russian. The language of communication in Latvia was German and my mother could speak fluent German. My grandfather died in 1930s. After he died grandmother Enta used to come on durable visits and stay with us for long.

I don't know how my parents met, but I think it was an arranged marriage through matchmaker. My mother told me that she had a traditional Jewish wedding in her parents' home. There was a chuppah and a rabbi conducted the wedding ceremony. They lived in Riga for some time, but my father didn't know German and had problems in this regard since the majority of people spoke German. I don't know for what reason my parents chose Novosokolniki, a district town in Kalinin region in Russia, in about 500 km to the south of Leningrad [520 km to the west from Moscow].

They moved there before their first baby was born. They rented an apartment at the beginning, but then their relatives lent my parents some money to buy a house. My older sister Elena was born in 1920. My other sister Lubov was born in 1923. Her Jewish name was Liebe, but I don't remember Elena's Jewish name. I was the third daughter. I was born in 1926 and named Zelda at birth.

### Growing up

The majority of population in Novosokolniki was Russian. Jews constituted about one third of the population. Jewish houses were neighboring with Russian houses and looked similar. There was a small synagogue and a Jewish school in Novosokolniki. There was a cheder before the revolution, but during the Soviet regime it was closed. In late 1920s the Jewish school was closed, too. There were not enough pupils at school. Jewish parents preferred to send their children to Russian school to avoid any language problems in future studies. Novosokolniki was a small town with wooden houses and some stone houses in the center of the town. There was no anti-Semitism before the war. I didn't even hear about any conflicts, though I presume there may have been instances. People respected each other's traditions and faith. My father was well respected in the town for his hard working nature. In general, Soviet people were living with the conviction that there were no nationalities, but a big family of the Soviet people. The synagogue was closed in early 1930s when the struggle against religion [7](#) began. The Orthodox and Catholic churches were also closed down.

We were poor. My father was the only breadwinner. My mother was a housewife. My father earned little money of which he had to pay off his debts to the relatives. My father also worked home in the evening to earn some additional money. He was a roofer and tinsmith. He made tin sheets for stoves. My father had his desk in the kitchen and we always heard him hammering on these sheets at night. My father was valued at his work; he was an udarnik [initiative and exemplary employees in Soviet enterprises]. He once received an award for hard work. There was a meeting and award ceremony that I attended. Another time he received a raincoat for his work. It was hard to buy things in stores and employees received warm clothes, shoes or something for home. The third award of my father's was a fence around the house. My father was a responsible employee.

I remember our small wooden house. There was a plot of land near the house. There was a cellar and a shed in the backyard where we kept a cow, geese and chickens. My mother took care of the animals. We had geese slaughtered for Pesach. There was a shochet living nearby. My mother melted geese fat and kept it in jars in the cellar. There were no refrigerators then. There was a big vegetable garden near the house. I helped my mother work in it. We grew potatoes, tomatoes and cabbage. It was a big support for the family. We bought hay for the cow from farmers. There was a market near our house. Those farmers used to bring us a cart full of hay. They stayed in our house when they came to sell their products at the market. We stored hay at the hayloft in the shed. We fetched water from the well in the street. In summer we had to fetch more water to water the garden.

The back door in the house led to a big kitchen. There was a big stove in the corner. My mother did the cooking on this stove and it also heated the house. There was one room in the house. I can't even imagine now how the three of us fit in there. There were three windows in the room and a wardrobe, chest of drawers, two iron beds and a couch. There was a table in the middle of the room and my mother's sewing machine in the corner. I slept with my sister, another sister slept with mother and our father slept on the couch. My father had religious books in Hebrew that he

read. My parents didn't buy fiction books. Our parents spoke Yiddish at home. My sisters and I spoke Yiddish with our parents and Russian between us.

In summers our father's sisters and brother visited us. Fruit, vegetables and food products in our town were not as expensive as in Leningrad. When they came they bought fruit and berries and made preserves for the winter. They used to come with their families. Our father installed a tent in the yard where my sisters, our father and I slept at night. Our guests were accommodated in the house.

In 1934 our grandmother Enta, my mother's mother, came to live with us. She occasionally went to visit her relatives in Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountains. My grandmother wore long black skirts and dark blouses. She always wore a black kerchief. I never saw my grandmother without it and don't even know what color was her hair. My grandmother was religious. She prayed in the morning and in the evening and read stories from the Torah. Grandmother strictly followed kashrut and made sure that my mother had everything kosher.

My father was religious, but my mother was not. She observed Jewish traditions, but she did it to please her parents rather than following her own convictions. On Fridays my mother prepared for the Sabbath. She baked two challah loaves: one for Friday and another one for Saturday. On Saturday it was not allowed to stoke a stove or light kerosene lamps. A Christian neighbor came to our houses to do this work for us. Our mother cooked for two days on Friday. She left food for Saturday in the oven. On Friday morning one of the children took a chicken to the shochet to have it slaughtered. Mother made chicken broth with noodles, strudels and carrot tsimes [Stew, usually made of carrots, parsnips or plums and eaten with potatoes]. In autumn when fish was inexpensive she bought fish from farmers to make Gefilte Fish. On Friday evening when our father came home from work we all prayed and our mother lit candles. Then we prayed again saying greetings to Saturday and sat down for dinner. We only had chicken and other delicacies at Sabbath and on holidays. Or father worked on Saturday morning. Saturday was a working day in the USSR and it was mandatory to come to work or he might have been fired for missing work. However, after work he put on his black suit to go to the synagogue. He had a tallit and tefillin. Our mother didn't go to synagogue. It was a small one-storied synagogue where women didn't go.

We celebrated Pesach at home. Preparations started long before the holiday. Mother made a general clean up and thoroughly washed and cleaned the kitchen. Then she started making matzah. Few other Jewish women came to our house to make matzah. They made dough and rolled it. They had to knead dough promptly. Maximum 18 minutes from the time water was added to flour to the moment of putting dough into the oven was allowed for dough. Beyond this time this dough could not be used for making matzah. It was supposed to be rolled out only on one side. My sisters and I were always eager to do this work. I was allowed to do it once. I rolled out the dough and turned it over. Somebody noticed it and I was told to leave the kitchen: the dough was not to be turned over, it was against the rules. I didn't know all rules, but if one of them was broken it could make the dough non-kosher. Our mother had a special ring to make little holes in the dough. Then the dough could be put in the oven. It always took several days to make matzah. Every family needed a lot of matzah since it was not allowed to eat bread through 8 days of the holiday. When matzah was ready we took fancy crockery from the attic. We also walked the house with a goose feather looking for breadcrumbs and if we found any we swept them onto a sheet to burn them in the oven. Our mother made a lot of food at Pesach. My sisters and I always looked

forward to this holiday. It was a rare opportunity to eat delicious and sufficient. Our mother ordered us to crash matzah in a mortar. This flour was sieved to be used for cooking. Mother made strudels and honey cakes from it. She made dumplings for chicken broth from bigger pieces of the matzah leftover. Mother cooked with goose fat at Pesach. Mother also stuffed chicken neck with flour, onions and chicken liver. It was very delicious. Our mother also made gefilte fish, puddings and goose stew.

Our father conducted seder when the first star arose in the sky on the first day of Pesach. Our father was sitting at the head of the table with his tallit and tefillin on. Since there were no boys I posed four traditional questions to our father. I didn't know Hebrew, but I learned these questions by heart and my father explained their meaning to me. Then our father recited a prayer and we waited impatiently until he finished. We couldn't wait to start eating. Adults drank four glasses of wine. Children had water with few drops of wine in our glasses.

We also celebrated Jewish New Year – Rosh Hashanah. Our father explained to us that we had to look back onto the year behind recalling our mistakes and sins and promise ourselves to improve. At Rosh Hashanah our mother baked round challah loaves, different from the ones she made at Sabbath. Our father went to the synagogue in the morning. There were strident sounds of shofar heard from the synagogue. When father returned from the synagogue our mother put apple cut to pieces and a saucer with honey on the table. We ate apples dipping them in honey. Our father explained that this was done to have a sweet year to come. There was Yom Kippur after Rosh Hashanah. On the eve of Yom Kippur fasting began with the first evening star. It lasted until the first evening star on the next day. My sisters and I fasted since we turned 6 the whole day. Our father went to the synagogue on the next day and when he returned home we sat down to dinner. I also remember Chanukkah. I remember this holiday mostly because we received some money as a gift on this holiday. We bought toys and sweets for this money. I don't remember whether we celebrated Sukkot. At least we didn't have a sukkah put up in the yard.

I went to school at the age of 8. This was a Russian school where my sisters studied, too. Our teacher called the roll at our first lesson and I said that my name was Zelda. The teacher said there was not such a name. Since then I was to be called Zenia – an affectionate form of Evgenia. I got used to be called by this name, though I have the name Evgenia written in my passport. I studied well at school. I was fond of literature and history. I had all good marks. Our teachers liked me. I was a sociable girl. I became a pioneer in the 4th form and sincerely thought it was a great honor.

In 1938 the life of our family changed dramatically. My father had an accident at work. He fell from the roof he was working on and injured his lung. Since there was no hospital in Novosokolniki my father was taken to hospital in the neighboring town of Velikie Luki. He developed pneumonia and died in the hospital. He was 42 years old. Since there was no Jewish cemetery in Novosokolniki my father was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Velikie Luki. I remember that he was buried without a casket in a white cerement. We had nothing to live on after our father died. We had to have our cow slaughtered since we didn't have any money to buy hay for her. We sold the meat. It was a hard time for our family. Our mother began to sew for her acquaintances. She got very little money for her work. My mother had to keep it in secret that she worked at home since she had no license. A financial inspector [state officer responsible for identification of illegal businesses] visited us often. My mother didn't have a profession to find employment. Well, she might have obtained a



license, but then she would have had to pay taxes that were rather excessive. We often had nothing to eat. I was the youngest and the weakest in the family. I got ill often and missed school. Whenever my mother could afford it she bought milk for me from our Jewish neighbor Chava, but this happened rarely.

## The Great Terror

Arrests in 1937 [Great Terror] [8](#) had an impact on our family too. My mother's younger sister Sima was a striking beauty. When after the revolution of 1917 the Civil War [9](#) began in Russia there were many foreign visitors sympathizing with Bolsheviks coming to our country. Sima's future husband Yakov Bugdant, an Austrian businessman, came to Russia to struggle for the Soviet power. I guess he had the rank of colonel at that time. My mother told me that Yakov was a very handsome and charming man. I don't know how he met Sima, but they fell in love with one another. They got married. When the Civil War was over Yakov stayed in the Russian Federation. He became a colonel in the Crimean NKVD [10](#) office. Sima and Yakov settled down in Simferopol [800 km from Kiev] in the Crimea. They had two daughters: Anna and Lubov. They were older than we. Sima didn't work. They were a wealthy family. My mother's older sister Genia that was already a widow and her daughter Sonia went to live with Sima in Simferopol. Genia helped Sima with the housework. My mother told me that Sima visited us once and when she saw me taking the cow to the pasture she almost fainted. She couldn't imagine that children could be forced to do work. Sima and her daughters didn't do any housework. They had Genia and a housemaid to do this for them. In 1937 Yakov Bugdant was arrested. They couldn't find any accusations against him. He was devoted to the Soviet power and was arrested innocent like many other people. In the charges against him it was stated that his deputy was an enemy of the people and Yakov was not vigilant enough to disclose him as such. He was sentenced to death and shot. There was a search in their home, but they found nothing suspicious. However, they confiscated their belongings and the apartment. Aunt Sima adored her husband and after this lost her mind. She ran the streets looking for her husband. Once she got under a tram by accident and lost a leg, but survived. After Sima's husband was arrested our mother was very worried that they were going to arrest us, even though Sima didn't keep in touch with us. My mother was a wife of a tinsmith and what did it have to do with a wife of an NKVD manager. During the war Sima and her daughters were evacuated to Siberia and after the war we lost all contacts with them. After Twentieth Party Congress [11](#) Yakov Bugdant was rehabilitated [12](#) posthumously. There is a stand dedicated to the life of Yakov Bugdant in the Historical Museum in Simferopol. After Yakov was arrested my mother's older sister Genia and her daughter came to live with us. They stayed with us until the war began. Grandmother Enta went to visit her relatives in Sverdlovsk shortly before the war. She died in Sverdlovsk in December 1941.

My older sister Elena finished secondary school in 1938. Elena wanted to continue her studies. She went to Sverdlovsk [over 1000 km from Moscow] where one of my mother's distant relatives lived. He offered Elena to live with his family. Elena failed at the entrance exam, but decided to stay there. She went to work as a laborer at a plant and studied in an evening accounting school.

## During the War

In the middle of June 1941 my summer vacations began. I finished the 7th grade at school. We never traveled. Our mother couldn't afford it. I was planning to meet with my friends, go swimming

and hiking in the summer. My sister Lubov finished the 10th grade and was planning to go take entrance exams to a college in Sverdlovsk. We heard on the radio that Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. At 12 o'clock on 22 June 1941 the radio announced that the war began and then Molotov [13](#) spoke. I remember our mother crying, but my sisters and I didn't even have fear. We were constantly told at school that our army was the strongest in the world and nobody could defeat it. The same was said on the radio and published in newspapers. We were sure that the war was to be over in few days or weeks at the most.

When evacuation began in Novosokolniki authorized officials made rounds of people's houses knocking on their windows to tell them to come to the station. They also said that we didn't have to take much luggage since we were to be back soon. We took a small suitcase thinking that it was just for a week we were leaving, but it happened to be for good. We locked the doors taking our house register book and a head cap from my mother's sewing machine and left our home. None of us ever came back to the house. The war took away everything from us. There were five of us going: our mother, my sister, me and, Genia and her daughter. We got on a freight train for transportation of cattle. We were bombed on the way. Nobody knew where we were going. Our trip lasted for almost a month. We didn't have any food. At some stations where there were evacuation offices we could get a bowl of soup. We reached Cherdyn, [550 km from Moscow] in Solikamsk we got accommodation in a school building. Local residents told us it was going to be hard in the winter. The River Kama was frozen for almost half a year and there were no food supplies during this period. Besides, there were many former convicts that got residential permits to live in this town. They were former convicts from prisons and camps. There were political and criminal prisoners. They were not allowed to return home or reside in bigger towns after serving their sentence and they didn't have a choice, but stay in northern towns. When we heard about it our mother suggested that we went to Sverdlovsk where we had relatives. We bought tickets and went to Sverdlovsk by boat. Representatives of the Evacuation Office met us at the station. We went to the office that arranged people to kolkhozes [14](#). We were taken to a small village of Malotrifonnoye, Egorshyn district, Sverdlovsk region. The kolkhoz was called 'Red Partisan'. We got accommodation in an abandoned house. My mother and Genia's daughter stayed at home and Genia, my sister Lubov and I went to work in the kolkhoz. We worked in the field. We knew what to do since we had done similar work before. However, we had to work so hard that we couldn't stand on our feet from exhaustion. We were constantly hungry. Villagers were very poor, too. Hardly anybody had a cow or a goat. At first we received one kilogram of flour per working day in the kolkhoz. I got 5-7 kg of flour per week. Then we received 0.5 kg per day that reduced to 250 grams gradually until we got nothing at all. Instead we were fed with the wartime slogan 'Everything for the front, everything for victory!' There were people evacuated via the 'Road of life' from Leningrad and few families from Moscow. When we got nothing for work in the kolkhoz people from poorer families began to die. We boiled nettle, picked some herb roots and berries in the wood. We also suffered from cold. We didn't have any winter clothes and the temperature dropped to - 40°C. Our neighbors gave us some rubber boots that we wore to work. We arrived at Malotrifonnoye in early October. It was already cold and we had to heat the house. Local people took us to the woods. There were huge and tall trees there. The locals gave us saws and axes and showed us how to cut a tree so that it fell on its side. I wonder how we didn't get killed by a falling tree... We had to chop wood from the tree that we cut. We were more dead than alive. We were so weak that we could hardly manage with an ax. We also had to pile the wood that also required some skills. It got dark soon in autumn. There were wolves that even came to the village... We had to take wood home on

sledges that we dragged. We had to take care of it after work in the evening looking back for wolves. I don't know how we survived.

My older sister Lubov met a girl that was taken by the 'Road of life' from Leningrad. My sister was a very determined girl. She convinced her friend to volunteer to the front. They were both 18. I was 15. They decided to go to the Navy for good food and warm clothing. They didn't share this idea with their household and walked 10 km to the military registry office where they said they wanted to serve in the Navy. They were sent to Leningrad with other recruits. When my mother heard about it she almost fainted. In Leningrad the girls studied at an artillery school. After finishing school my sister and few others were sent to an island in the Finnish Bay. They were the first to meet German planes that headed to Leningrad. They shot at them. They slept in holes that they made in the layer of snow. Once a week a small boat delivered food to this island. We occasionally received letters from my sister.

In winter 1941 many people in Malotrifonnoye village began to die from hunger. My mother got ill. She couldn't walk and had her legs swollen from hunger. Genia and her daughter went to our relatives in Sverdlovsk in 150 km from the village. My sister Elena lived there since 1938. My mother told me to go to Elena to save my life. I was afraid of leaving my mother. Actually, I had to go there. We received a telegram from our relatives saying that Elena had a tram accident. My mother cried and asked me to go to my sister. We had Elena's address and knew that worked at the plant of plastic. I went to Sverdlovsk.

I went from one hospital to another until I found my sister. She had broken collarbone, head injury and concussion. Elena gave me the key to her room in the basement in the center of the town. There was a stove with a stack and a steel bed in her room. The next day I went to the plant where she worked as an accountant and found a friend of hers that helped me to get a job. I worked in a hazardous place at the plant. This was a military plant. My task was to test parts of planes with an indicator tool. I worked in the upper tier where poisonous gases were accumulating. When my sister returned from the hospital she went with her friend to take our mother to Sverdlovsk. They almost carried her in their arms.

Elena got married in Sverdlovsk in 1943. Her husband was in evacuation from Chernovtsy. His parents died in evacuation. A bomb hit their boat. He was among few survivors. I don't remember Elena's husband first name, his last name was Korenburg and he was Jewish. He was born in 1920. They had two sons: Michael and Semyon, born in 1946 and 1950, accordingly. Elena's son died shortly after he got married. He was under 30. Her second son lives in Sverdlovsk with his family. Elena died in Sverdlovsk in 1992. Her husband passed away a year after.

Lubov was severely wounded in her leg in 1943 and demobilized from the army. She came to Sverdlovsk wearing her uniform and there were medals and orders covering the front of her jacket. She received awards even after the war. Mother used to say that Lubov even had a character of a soldier. Her husband Yakov Feldman was Jewish. He was a nice man. His parents perished. Yakov was an agreeable man, but his sister was a dictator in the family. In 1947 their daughter Raisa was born and in 1950 – daughter Alla. Lubov went to work as an accountant at the factory of plastic where Elena and I were working. They received accommodation in a barrack of the factory. The five of them lived in a small room with a stove and two iron beds. My mother lived with Lubov. Some time later my sister and her husband received a nice apartment with all comforts in the center of



Sverdlovsk. Our mother died in 1958, before they got a new apartment. She was buried at the town cemetery of Sverdlovsk. Lubov's husband Yakov died in 1999. My sister and I correspond and talk on the phone occasionally. My sister's daughters also live in Sverdlovsk.

I met my future husband in Sverdlovsk. The plant where I worked was sponsoring a hospital where my future husband junior lieutenant of medical service Lev Gendler worked. Lev was born in a Jewish family in Kiev in 1920. He studied in Kiev Forestry Engineering College. At the beginning of the War the College evacuated to Sverdlovsk where Lev finished his studies and went to the front. He was shell-shocked and had to go to hospital. After the hospital he couldn't go back to the front since there was something wrong with his movement coordination function. He finished a military medical school with all excellent marks. When Lev was in hospital our plant invited all patients to dancing. My sister dragged me to this party. I was a shy girl and did not attend events like that. Lev invited me to dance with him. He didn't impress me much. I didn't even think about love. I thought love was for a peaceful time and was quite out of place at wartimes. He invited me to the theater and then became to visit us at home. Finally he proposed to me. I was 18. I didn't say anything in response. In April 1945 Lev went to his parents in Kiev, but promised that he would be back for me.

### **After the War**

I remember 9th May 1945 when the radio announced the capitulation of Germany and the end of the war. People came into the streets. They hugged and kissed greeting each other. In the evening we went to the central square to watch fireworks. We felt happy: the war was over and so was this horror of life. We didn't know whether we should leave Sverdlovsk. Nobody was waiting for us at home and we didn't know whether our house was still there. There was uncertainty in Novosokolniki while here we had jobs and a place to live. We decided to stay in Sverdlovsk. Lev was out of my mind. I thought it was just an adventure. On 31st December 1945 I received a telegram from Lev. He notified me that he was arriving. He came when we were sitting down to have a New Year dinner. Lev said he had come for me. His parents received an apartment in Kiev. He told them that he was bringing home the girl he loved. We had a civil marriage in Sverdlovsk. We received food in our factory canteen for 3 days in advance: bread, soup and cereal and this made our wedding dinner. After the civil ceremony we ran home and had dinner with my sister and mother. Next day we left for Kiev. My husband's parents were born in a village near Kiev. His father's name was Froim Gendler and his mother's name was Sarra. After they got married they moved to Kiev. Lev's father went to work as a turner at the Bolshevik Plant [the biggest military plant in Kiev] and his mother was a housewife. Lev's younger brother Usher was in Air Force troops in the front. He was a flight-engineer, was wounded and had awards. After the war he got married and went to live with his wife. Usher worked at the Bolshevik Plant. He died from cancer when he was young.

There were two rooms and a kitchen in Lev's family's apartment. My husband and I lived in one room. Lev's parents were religious. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. On holidays his mother and father went to synagogue. They had matzah at Pesach and fasted at Yom Kippur. My husband and I were not religious. Lev began to work as an engineer in the Ministry of Furniture Industry. My father-in-law helped me to get a job as human resource inspector at the Bolshevik Plant. I joined Komsomol [15](#) at the plant. I obtained my Komsomol membership card at the Komsomol Committee of the plant. I believed it was an important step in my life.

We earned little money. Life was hard in Kiev after the war. There were no goods in stores and markets were expensive. My husband received 600 rubles and a loaf of bread cost 300 in the market. On 7th December 1946 our first baby was born. We named him Arkadi, after my father: my father's Jewish name was Arl-Itzhok and my son's Jewish name was Arl. We could hardly make ends with our salaries. Subcarpathia [16](#) became a Soviet territory. Before 1945 it belonged to Hungary. They had a need of forestry engineers and my husband was invited to work at Zakarpatles Forestry Office in Uzhhorod. They promised to give us an apartment. My husband was appointed to the position of chief engineer at the forestry of Chinadiyevo in 50 km from Uzhhorod. Chinadiyevo was a small town. Men worked at the forestry and women were housewives. We received a small house. My husband went to work and I stayed at home with our son. I planted vegetables near the house and bought a goat and chicken.

In 1948 I became an extramural student of the Pedagogical School in Mukachevo that was not far from Chinadiyevo. I finished school in 1952. I couldn't find work since there was one lower secondary school in the town and no vacancies. My husband joined the Party in Chinadiyevo. It was mandatory for managers. In 1952 my husband became chief engineer of Zakarpatles Association in Uzhhorod. We received a nice apartment with all comforts in the center of Uzhhorod. I liked Uzhhorod at once. It was a lovely quiet town. People were friendly. There were many Jews in Uzhhorod before the war, but during the war most of them perished in concentration camps. There was no negative attitude toward Jews. Anti-Semitism began in 1952, after the doctors' plot [17](#), but it had no impact on us. Local residents had no conflicts with Jews. I believe anti-Semitism was brought in by newcomers.

I remember how sad I was when Stalin died in March 1953. Stalin was our god. I cried and thought it was the end of the world. My husband also cried. When Nikita Khrushchev [18](#) spoke on the Twentieth Party Congress [19](#) denouncing the cult of Stalin I didn't like it at all. I thought it was speculation to gain scores. Of course, now I understand that I was wrong, but this was what I grew up with. I learned a lot about Stalin's evil-doing after the rehabilitation of Yakov Bugdant, my mother's sister's, Sima's, husband; arrested in 1937. I lost my faith in Stalin.

After we moved to Uzhhorod I went to work. I always liked sewing like my mother. I was good at it and went to work as an instructor at the garment school in the House of Officers of Uzhhorod. I received a small salary, but it was convenient that the school was not far from our apartment. I worked there until 1976 when I was offered to become a school teacher. I liked working with children and became a sewing instructor at school. I trained girls. Their parents were very happy about this opportunity for their daughters. I retired in 1979. I had good relationships at work. I never faced any anti-Semitism at work.

We didn't observe Jewish traditions in the family. In my husband's position it was not allowed to bring up our children Jewish. Of course, the children knew that they were Jews and they didn't keep it a secret, but we were not raising them Jewish.

We often had guests at home. We celebrated soviet holidays: 1st May [Labor Day], 7th November [October Revolution Day] [20](#) and Victory Day [9th May, a major Soviet holiday, celebrating the victory over Nazi Germany]. We also celebrated our birthdays and New Year. We had many friends. We never made friends based on national origins, however it happened so that most of them were Jews. We didn't celebrate any Jewish holidays.

In 1956 our daughter, Victoria was born. Our children brought us happiness. They studied well, liked reading, going to the theater and doing sports. Our daughter had a beautiful voice. She studied singing at the music school.

My husband and I liked spending time with our children. In summer we traveled to the Crimea and the Caucasus Mountains. Our children liked swimming in the sea and we enjoyed our time together. Sometimes we spent vacations with our friends. My husband and I went on tours to different places in the USSR. When our children grew up and had other things to do my husband and I went to recreation centers in Subcarpathia. Our son finished school with all excellent but two good marks. He always liked studying. After finishing school he decided to follow his father's steps and entered the Forestry Engineering College in Lvov. Arkadi passed his entrance exams successfully and enrolled to the Mechanical Faculty. We rented a room for him. He studied well and got a job assignment to Uzhhorod even before graduation.

My daughter Victoria entered the Faculty of Vocal at the Conservatory. Her teachers said she was going to become a wonderful singer, but it was not to be. My daughter died of anaphylactic shock during a trivial larynx flushing with penicillin in 1979. I won't even mention what a hard blow Victoria's death was on us. We buried her in the town cemetery in Uzhhorod. It wasn't a Jewish funeral. After my daughter died I lost interest in life. I became of retirement age and submitted my letter of resignation at work. My colleagues told me that I would feel better being among people, but I left.

My son got married in his 30s. His wife Laura is a Jew. Laura's father came from Uzhhorod and her mother was born in Georgia. Laura finished Stomatological Faculty in Georgia and got a job assignment [21](#) to Subcarpathia. She met Arkadi and they got married. They didn't have a Jewish wedding. Laura received a two-room apartment in a new district in Uzhhorod. After our daughter died our apartment became too big for us. We offered our son to exchange apartments and moved into their smaller apartment. In 1988 Arkadi and Laura's daughter Victoria was born. She was named after my daughter. My granddaughter studies in the 9th grade. After finishing she wants to enroll in the Stomatological College in Uzhhorod.

When in 1970s Jews began to move to Israel we didn't consider this option. We had no relatives there and were afraid of going to a different country. I didn't quite understand why people were leaving their country where they grew up, but I supported and helped our acquaintances with packing, buying things and selling their belongings and gave them moral support. Also our close friends left, whom we corresponded with later on. At first we did it through our common acquaintances to avoid any impact of this on my husband's career. When perestroika began we could correspond without intermediates. I was glad to hear that they didn't regret their move and that they were having a good life. By now they have passed away and now their daughter writes me.

Наш сын тоже не изъявлял желания уехать, а вдвоем с мужем уезжать я не хотела. А теперь уже поздно об этом думать.

When perestroika began life became more difficult. It was impossible to live on pension. Many enterprises closed down and there was unemployment. The fall down of the USSR was a shock for me. It was hard to realize that everything I was used to collapsed. Perhaps, it was easier for younger people. During perestroika I went back to work in the House of Officers. The Director gave

me a job offer and my husband told me to accept it. When our daughter died my husband wanted me to be among people to get distracted from our terrible loss. I worked another 10 years and quit when my husband fell seriously ill. He died in 1998. My husband didn't particularly quit the Party, but it stopped officially existing in 1991 that automatically closed his membership. I buried him near our daughter. It wasn't a Jewish funeral. Since then I've lived alone. My son calls me few times a day and comes to see me. I also understand that he has a family and has to take care of them.

When Ukraine became independent Jewish life here revived. Jews couldn't openly talk about their nationality before. Now they have united to help and support each other. Hesed was organized in Uzhhorod in 1999. It supports and provides assistance to older Jews. It's no secret that it is impossible to live on our pension: we have to pay our monthly utilities that are high and medications are expensive. Patients also have to pay for surgeries. Now doctors are not shy asking their patients whether they can pay for a surgery that that is necessary for them. Many people are ill and die since they cannot afford to get medical treatment.

I don't know what would happen to us if there were not Hesed. They give us food packages every month. We can also have meals at the canteen. They say the food is delicious there. Besides it helps us old people to forget our loneliness. We attend clubs and cultural events. Hesed has moved into a beautiful building, though the old one was all right with us, too. I visit Hesed almost every day. They invite me. Since Hesed was organized in Uzhhorod it became easier for me to cope with my loneliness. When I feel all right I go there to see my friends. I like it there. People are friendly. They've returned elderly people back to life. I enjoy going there. Nobody waits for me at home. I do my hair and face to go to Hesed. Hesed filled my life and gave me new friends.

## **Glossary**

**1** Russian Revolution of 1917: Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

## **2 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **3 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of

the blockade.

#### **4 Road of Life**

Passage across the Ladoga lake in winter. It was due to the Road of Life across the frozen Lake Ladoga that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

#### **5 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

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

#### **6 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

#### **7 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.

#### **8 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

#### **9 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik



volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

## **10 NKVD**

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

## **11 Twentieth Party Congress**

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.

## **12 Rehabilitation**

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

## **13 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.

## **14 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

**15 Komsomol:** Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

## **16 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)**

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

## **17 Doctors' Plot**

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

## **18 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **19 Twentieth Party Congress**

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.

## **20 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great

October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

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

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.