

Khaya Nakhmanovna Detinko

01	<p>Do you know what it's like not to have a single photo from your childhood? To be growing old and have only memories?</p> <p>That's because for ten years, I was cut off from the world in a Soviet prison camp. It took another thirty-six years before I could finally go and visit my family in Israel.</p> <p>That is where my old friends and my family gave me one picture after another, so now my past isn't just a story to tell you, — it's a story I can show you, too.</p>
C 01	<p>Chapter one Born in another world, in another time</p>
02	<p>This is where I was born in the year 1920. It's called Rovno. Back then, Rovno was in Poland; now it's in Ukraine.</p> <p>Rovno was like so many towns in Poland then— it was a bustling town with many religious Jews and some modern Jews.</p> <p>This is my father—Nakhman Abramovich Kats.</p> <p>He went to religious school and even graduated as a rabbi. He was afraid he would never be able to support a family. So he became a businessman.</p> <p>My mother, Pesya-Mindele Pinkhas, was born in Rovno in 1897. My parents married during the First World War and had four children.</p> <p>Hava, me, Aron, and Bella.</p> <p>Our family was traditional and religious and mom kept a kosher home.</p>
03	<p>There was a fine synagogue in the center of Rovno and Dad was on the managing board.</p> <p>When I was six-years-old my parents sent me to a Tarbut school. Tarbut schools were famous for teaching in both Polish and in Hebrew.</p>
04	<p>Here I am with my sister Hava when we had dressed up for Purim. I had made the costumes myself.</p> <p>My mom had instilled in me the love of sewing and when I was 16, I went to an ORT school with a training program for tailoring and sewing.</p>
05	<p>In 1932, Hava met a dashing young man, Yakov Blikh. They were in Hashomer Hatzair, the Young Watchmen—they fell in love, and like most of them in Hashomer, they were determined to move to Palestine and help build a Jewish state.and so they left.</p> <p>They weren't the only the only ones, I can tell you. Things were getting very bad for Jews in Poland then. There were anti-Jewish protests, and when Marshal Pilsudski died, we lost a real friend.</p> <p>Since I adored Hava, I wanted to do everything she did. So I joined Hashomer, too.</p> <p>Here I am with my Hashomer group in the summer of 1938. We went to a pioneer camp, learned songs and worked as if we were on a real kibbutz.</p>
06	<p>And here's another Hashomer picture: that's me second from the right. First from the right is Gisyah Pishaleva, my best friend, here we are again.</p>
07	<p>All around us, our relatives and friends were leaving Poland for Palestine. Here's our family saying goodbye to relatives.</p> <p>I knew that it was time for me to get ready to leave, too.</p>

C 02	Chapter two Into Stalin's Gulag
08	In September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland from the west . Then the Soviets swept in from the east . Rovno was suddenly inside the Soviet Union . And emigrate to Palestine? Out of the question
09	Immediately, my father could no longer work as a businessman—not in a communist society. He got a job working in a warehouse. Polish partisans were hung, people were picked up by the NKVD . I was working as a bookkeeper and I had thought I had found my place in this new society.
10	On the 5 th showed me a warrant with my name on it. My mother fainted. I rushed to give her some water and when her eyes opened she asked, “Why did you bring me back? I should die—if they are taking you away, I don’t want to live!” They took me to a prison where I found seven of my friends—all from Hashomer! “Why are we here?” I asked them. “Because they decided that Hashomer is anti-Soviet ”, they told me.
	The very next day—it was very hot out-- my parents sent me a box, I opened it to find winter clothes. I thought I am going to be afraid now. Very afraid.
10	Then, seventeen days later, on 22 June, right at 4:00 am while we were sleeping, there was this terrible wailing siren and instantly, we all knew what had happened. The war had started!
	The police hurried us onto a prison train heading east. German planes bombed the rail lines, people were killed, but we kept going.
	We traveled for weeks until we reached Kamyshin in the Stalingrad region. They threw us in jail again.
	But the front began coming closer and they moved us to a filthy overcrowded barge. Cholera sprang up; people were dying.
	We were taken off the barge and sent off to the Kazan region and a place called Sviyaga where they put us in a huge prison camp.
	There would be more camps— eleven in all until 1945-- and that is when I finally received my sentence for my crime of being in a Zionist youth club. I received ten years of hard labor and five more years in exile in Siberia .
	I was sent to a penal camp called East Ural Lag in a city called Tavda. I was 8,000 kilometers from home. I was assigned to general drudgery—they were digging ditches, cutting trees. When they found out I could sew, they let me become a seamstress.
	Someone took this picture of us that summer—that’s me on the left. Day in, day out, we lived in terrible barracks, ate awful food, and trudging off to work for twelve hours a day. Year after year—cut off from the world. One day an officer came in and said that he had good news for us. The war had ended and the Soviet Union had been victorious .
	But we didn’t say a thing. Nothing would change for us.

12	<p>Then, a year later, I was told my brother Aron had survived the war, and was coming all the way out there to see me. On that day I learned what happened back in Rovno.</p> <p>Aron told me that the Germans stormed into the city in the summer of 1941, just after I was taken away. All the Jews were rounded up, put into a ghetto, and later, taken out and shot in the Sosyonki forest. Somehow, Aron escaped. My father, my mother, and my sister Bela were shot.</p>
	<p>Aron left me that day, and in time, made his way to Israel.</p>
C 03	<p>Chapter three Back into the world</p>
13	<p>In 1951, as my sentence came to an end, I began my life in exile. I was sent to a village on the Yenisei River called Maklakovo. which they call Lesosibirsk today. In exile I could work, I could live, and I started a small tailor's shop.</p>
14	<p>I found other Jews living there, and we quietly met for the Jewish holidays. One Pesach, somebody invited another man—Shaya Itskovich Detinko-- and he said, "I heard you have a sewing machine," and I said that's right. And he said, "Can I come and sew myself a cap?" This is how our friendship began.</p>
	<p>Shaya had been born in Poland in 1903. Because he and his wife were Communists, they emigrated to the Soviet Union. But while Shaya was rector of a university, his wife was suddenly arrested and executed as a Polish spy.</p> <p>Shaya was sent off to Siberia.</p>
15	<p>Shaya and I shared stories of lost families, we became close friends, fell in love and we got married.</p>
	<p>How do two people start life over after such a history? First you have a son—Victor. You build a small house and you wait for your official permission to leave a life of prison and exile.</p>
16	<p>Our permission came in 1961 and we returned to Shaya's city, Leningrad.</p>
	<p>As hard as it was to believe, Shaya was asked to come back to the same university. They even made him rector again. I worked as a dressmaker.</p>
	<p>Life had turned around for us, life was good, until Shaya fell ill in 1965 with throat cancer. We lost him three years later when Victor was only ten-years-old.</p>
	<p>Victor studied incredibly hard in school and became an engineer for Lentefonstroy.</p>
	<p>He married Tanechka and they have two daughters, Irochka and Katya, and they became engineers. Together, we are a close and a happy family.</p>
	<p>Epilogue "If you will it, it is no dream." Theodor Herzl</p>
	<p>I remember it was 1989, during perestroika, I was finally able to do something I had wanted to do since 1938—I travelled to Israel.</p>
	<p>My sister Hava had died before I ever got to see her again, but I was with her children, and with my brother Aron and his family.</p>
	<p>I spent three months in Israel—me—the Zionist who was imprisoned for more than a decade--and then denied the chance to emigrate.</p>

	<p>So many old friends from Rovno! So many memories! And that is where they gave me back one picture after another—like this one, from Gisyra.</p> <p>Two years after I returned home, the Soviet Union Union collapsed and more than one million of Jews made Aliyah to Israel, but by then, I was already 70-years-old. A little old to be a young watchman. My time for emigrating had passed.</p>
	<p>But I've always liked to be useful, and after the changes in 1991, I started volunteering in our Jewish Hesed community.</p>
	<p>People like me are there to help each other. On holidays we also cook for each other, so we don't have to celebrate alone. I've been inviting friends over for the Jewish holidays.</p>
	<p>We show each other pictures of our families here—and in Israel. And it gives me the chance to tell my stories of Rovno, and share the memories of a world I once lived in.</p>