

# Isaac Klinger

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ada Goldferb

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*Isaac Klinger is an elderly man. He will turn 95 this year. However, he has an excellent memory. Isaac tries to go to the synagogue every morning when he feels well. He lives with his wife in a communal apartment [1](#) in the center of town. The couple makes use of volunteers from Hesed, who help them run errands and attend social events.*



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### **Family Background**

My paternal grandfather, Itzyk Klinger, was born in Starokonstantinov, Khmel'nitskiy region, in 1848. [Starokonstantinov was a district town in Volyn' province. According to the census of 1897 its population was 16,300, 9,212 of them were Jewish.] In the late 1870s my grandparents and their four children moved to Mayaki [a village in Odessa district, Kherson province. According to the census of 1897 its population was 4,575; 648 of them were Jewish.]

My grandfather was a cabinetmaker. He had a shop where he manufactured doors and window frames. He rented an apartment. He couldn't afford to buy a house since he just earned enough for the family to make ends meet. My father told me that Grandfather Itzyk was a very religious man. He went to the synagogue, observed the kashrut, kept all holidays and fasted at Yom Kippur. He didn't work on Saturday.

Grandfather got married in 1869. My grandmother, Milia Klinger, was also born in Starokonstantinov, in 1851. I don't know her maiden name. She was a housewife. She observed the kashrut, wore a kerchief and kept all Jewish holidays. My grandfather and grandmother spoke Yiddish. My grandmother died in Mayaki in 1883. She was only 32 years old. I don't know why she died. My grandfather was to raise four children.

In 1884 my grandfather remarried. I don't remember my father's stepmother's name. In his second marriage my grandfather had six children. My grandfather was raising his children religiously: they went to the synagogue on all Jewish holidays, observed the kashrut and Sabbath. My father and his brothers studied in cheder. My grandfather died in Mayaki in 1904. He had a Jewish funeral: my father and his older brother Motka recited the Kaddish and the family sat shivah. My grandfather had ten children.

My father's older brother Motka was born in Starokonstantinov in 1871. Motka was a cabinetmaker and worked together with Grandfather in his shop. In 1895 he moved to Odessa and married a Jewish girl. His wife's name was Chaika. Her family lived in Moldavanka [poor Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. Motka and Chaika observed all Jewish holidays and fasted at Yom Kippur.

During the Civil War [3](#) Motka and his family moved to the village of Mayaki near Odessa. Motka starved to death in 1921 and Chaika died during the NEP [4](#) in 1928, I guess. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Mayaki.

They had twelve children. I knew three of them, born in Odessa. Their daughter Reveka, born in 1908, finished a likbez [5](#). She was married. Her husband, Yuzia Feldman, moved to Odessa from a smaller town. He was a galvanizing operator. Reveka and Yuzia had a son whose name was Marik. Reveka died in Odessa in 1971. Yuzia died in the 1990s. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery. Marik got married. He worked as an engineer. He moved to Germany with his family in the 1990s.

Motka's daughter Zina was born in Odessa in 1910. She finished a Jewish school and got married at the age of 16. Her husband came from a wealthy family: his father owned a leather-carrying factory during the NEP. After their only child died, Zina divorced her husband. He was a drunkard and a womanizer.

In 1934 she married a Jewish widower named Shtein, who had a son named Misha, born in 1928. Her second husband was a logistics manager. I don't remember where he worked, though. In 1938 their son Alfred was born. During the Great Patriotic War [6](#) Zina and her children were in evacuation in Tashkent. Her husband perished at the front. In 1946 Zina became my second wife.

Motka's son Isaac was born in 1912. He finished a lower secondary school – seven years, and worked in nickel plating in a shop in Odessa. He got married before the Great Patriotic War. His wife's name was Raya and their daughter's name was Asia. During the Great Patriotic War his wife and daughter were in evacuation in Tashkent. Isaac was in the ghetto in Odessa during the war, and a camp in Domanevka [7](#).

After the war he worked in the nickel-plating business. I don't remember where exactly he worked. Isaac died in Odessa in 1993. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. Motka's children observed Jewish holidays and fasted at Yom Kippur, but they were not religious.

My father's second brother, whose name I don't remember, was born in Starokonstantinov in 1873. All I know about him is that he moved to the USA in 1893 to avoid military service in the tsarist army.

My father's sister Reizl was born in Starokonstantinov in 1875. She had no education. She married a widower. Her husband was a clerk in a timber storage facility in the village of Zeltsy, Odessa

region. This was a German colony [8](#). Her husband had a daughter from his first wife. They didn't have children of their own. Reizl was a housewife. She died of diabetes in 1929. I don't know when Reizl's husband died. He probably lived with his daughter after Reizl died.

I know little about my father's stepsister Chova: she was born in Mayaki in 1885. She got married and lived somewhere near the Turkish border – perhaps in Armenia. She had one son that drowned.

My father's half-sister Anneta was born in 1888. In 1911 she married a Jewish man from Odessa. They owned a small hardware store in Odessa. I don't remember whether they sold their store or it was expropriated from them after the NEP.

Her son, whose name I don't remember, was recruited to the army before the Great Patriotic War. He served in a frontier unit in Azerbaijan and perished at the border during the war with Iran. Anneta's husband stayed in Odessa and perished.

Anneta evacuated to Tashkent with Uncle Motka's son Isaac's wife and daughter. After the war she returned to Odessa. She was 67 and spent the rest of her life in Isaac's family. She died in Odessa in 1963. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery, but no Jewish rituals were followed, which was a common thing at the time.

Another half-brother of my father was born in Mayaki in 1892. I don't remember his name and have no information about his life.

My father's half-sister Sonia was born in 1895. She moved to Odessa in 1916 and married a Jewish man. His name was Israel Topelberg. He was a diver. Sonia was a housewife. She died in Odessa in 1938. I don't remember when Israel died. They had two sons. Fascists hanged their older son Ziama in Odessa during the Great Patriotic War. He was a partisan. Their younger son Grisha was a driver. Grisha married his cousin sister Bella, Uncle Nuska's daughter. Bella died in the late 1990s. Grisha lives in Odessa.

My father's half-brother Nuska was born in 1897. He was handicapped. He had cerebral paralysis of his legs. In 1916 he also moved to Odessa. He had no education and worked as a shoemaker. He had a small shoe-repair shop. He had a license. He married a Jewish girl named Rukhl. They had two daughters: Bella and Lisa, and two sons: Izia and Misha.

When the Great Patriotic War began Nuska, his wife, their two daughters and Misha evacuated to Tashkent. Their son Izia stayed in Odessa. His cousin Ziama and he joined the underground movement and fascists hanged them as partisans.

After the war Nuska's family returned to Odessa. Their older daughter Bella finished a medical college after the war and worked as a doctor. She married her cousin brother Grisha. They had two children: Petia and Roman.

Nuska died of infarction in Odessa in 1962. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. I don't remember when Rukhl died.

Nuska's daughter Lisa was single. She moved to the USA in 1989. She worked as a medical nurse for eight years and then she returned to Odessa due to her health condition. She stayed in Odessa for a few years and then went back to the USA in 1999. She could live on her pension there.

Misha got married in evacuation in Tashkent. After the Great Patriotic War he worked as a shoemaker. Misha moved to Australia with his family. He died in 1999.

My father's youngest half-brother Abram was born in Mayaki in 1900. He disappeared during the Civil War in 1919.

My father, Leizer Klinger, was born in Starokonstantinov, Khmel'nitskiy region, in 1877. He studied in cheder and could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. In his teens he began to help Grandfather Itzyk in his cabinetmaking business, after Grandfather remarried. My father was raised in a Jewish family. He went to the synagogue, wore a kippah and fasted at Yom Kippur, but he didn't have a beard. This is all I know from my father's childhood.

In 1897 my father left Mayaki for Odessa looking for more prospects with regards to finding a job. He stayed in his brother Motka's lodging. He got a job as a cabinetmaker for some construction subcontractor. In 1900 he was recruited to the tsarist army. He went to serve in Starokonstantinov. I don't know whether he observed Jewish traditions there. I don't think there was a ban for traditions. After his military service term was over my father returned to Odessa. He worked as cabinetmaker at the jute factory.

My mother's father, Leib Volotsenko, was born in Mayaki, Belyayevskiy district, Odessa region, in 1852, and my maternal grandmother, Shyfra Volotsenko, was also born there in 1855. I don't know her maiden name. In 1874 my grandmother and grandfather got married. Grandmother Shyfra was a housewife. She was religious: she prayed and went to the synagogue. My grandparents had four children, born in Mayaki.

Mayaki was located on the bank of the Dnestr River. Before 1940 the Dnestr was a border with Romania. It was a big village of about a thousand farms. It had a Jewish, Russian and Ukrainian population. Jews were craftsmen for the most part: cabinetmakers, carpenters, shoemakers and tailors. There were wealthier Jews dealing in timber that floated down the Dnestr River from Western Ukraine.

My mother told me that Grandfather Leib was a good tailor. He did mending, altering and made new clothes for his clients from neighboring villages. When his sons grew old enough he taught them his profession and they began to help him.

Grandfather Leib rented an apartment. He finished cheder and observed all Jewish traditions: he went to the synagogue, prayed with his tallit on, fasted at Yom Kippur and wore a kippah.

There were two synagogues in Mayaki: one for poor and another one for wealthy Jews. The synagogue for wealthy Jews was on the bank of the Dnestr River. I don't know which synagogue my grandfather attended, but my parents went to the synagogue for wealthy Jews located near our house.

Grandfather was raising his children religiously. His two sons went to cheder. Grandfather taught his daughters to pray and they attended the synagogue. All children fasted at Yom Kippur. My grandmother taught my mother and her sister to observe the kashrut, cook Jewish food and observe holidays.

My grandmother died in Mayaki in 1903. I don't know the cause of her death. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery and the Jewish tradition was observed. Grandfather Leib died in 1904. He must have died of some disease since old age simply couldn't have been the reason of his death: he was not that old. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Mayaki. There was a Jewish funeral. His sons recited the Kaddish and sat shivah.

My mother's older brother Yankel was born in 1875. He finished cheder and could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. He followed into his father's footsteps and became a tailor. Yankel lived in Mayaki and was married twice. His first wife Milia, a Jew, was a housewife. They had four children. After his wife died he remarried. His second wife Golda, also a Jew, was a housewife. They had six children.

During the Great Patriotic War fascists shot Yankel, Golda and their daughter Chasia in Mayaki in 1941. Yankel's son Lyova perished at the front on the first days of the war. Yankel's older daughter Zhenia lived in Odessa. She was married and had two sons and a daughter. During the war they were in evacuation somewhere. Lyova and Zhenia were Yankel's children from his first wife Milia. I have no information about his other children from both marriages.

My mother's other brother Zeilik was born in 1877. He finished cheder and could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. He also became a tailor. He got married and had two daughters and three sons. He lived in Mayaki. He died in Mayaki before the Great Patriotic War. I don't remember what caused his death. His daughters Milia and Sima live in Odessa. I have no information about his sons.

My mother's older sister Molka was born in 1880. She had no education. She married a Jewish man. Her husband, Yudka Kopshtyk, was a shoemaker. They had three daughters and two sons. Molka and her husband starved to death in 1921.

Their older son Mohnes was a shoemaker. He was raising his brothers and sisters after their parents died. Molka's daughter Basia starved to death in Mayaki in the 1920s. Mohnes perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. Milia and Taba evacuated to Middle Asia. Milia lived in Astrakhan after the war. Taba moved to Odessa after the war. Boris was at the front. He was wounded several times, but he survived. After the war he lived somewhere in Kuban [Krasnodarskiy region, Russia]. He was the director of a shoe shop. This is all the information I have about them.

My mother, Riva Volotsenko, was born in Mayaki, Belyayevskiy district, Odessa region in 1883. She was the youngest daughter in the family. She didn't go to school. She got religious education in the family: her father taught her prayers in Hebrew and her mother taught her all Jewish traditions. My mother learned to cook traditional food. She observed the kashrut and Sabbath and wore long-sleeved gowns that Jewish girls were supposed to wear. In 1903 she moved to Odessa looking for a job. She went to work at the jute factory. I don't know where she lived. She probably rented a room.

My parents met at the jute factory and got married in 1904. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. Their friends and relatives helped them with the wedding. They rented a facility for the party. When my parents got married they rented a small one-room apartment on Hospitalnaya Street in the center of Moldavanka. They had a small room and a kitchen.

When my older brother Dodik was born in 1905 there was a big Jewish pogrom in Odessa [9](#). My father told me about it. About one thousand Jews perished then. There were Jewish defense units [10](#) armed with knives and self-made grenades. My father was also a member of such a group. Our family did not suffer during this pogrom, but many Jewish families in Moldavanka did.

## Growing Up

In 1907 my mother was expecting another baby. She moved to her sister Molka in Mayaki, where my sister Shyfra was born. I was also born in Mayaki on 12th June 1908. At that time my father found a well-paid job at a timber facility in Vygoda near Odessa and our mother returned to Odessa with us. In 1911 my younger sister Milia was born in Odessa and in 1912 my brother Lyova was born.

My mother was religious. She wore a kerchief and long-sleeved dresses. In the evening on Sabbath my mother lit candles and prayed. She had challah made for Sabbath and my father said a blessing prayer over the bread. Then we had a meal. My mother had separate kosher utensils for meat and dairy products. We didn't eat pork since it was non-kosher food. My mother took poultry to a shochet to have it slaughtered. We had matzah at Pesach. My mother made gefilte fish and keyzele at Pesach. We used special crockery that was kept in the attic during the year.

My mother and father went to the synagogue in Moldavanka on all Jewish holidays. However, my parents couldn't afford to pay the high rental fees in Odessa considering that we were a big family and we moved to Mayaki.

When World War I began in 1914 my father was recruited to the army. He served in a field engineering unit that was responsible for building bridges. My father's commandment was satisfied with my father's performance. The chief engineer of his unit, a Russian colonel, respected my father a lot. I don't know whether there were many Jews participating in World War I, but there was no anti-Semitism. I know that my father got it in the neck from his first sergeant for dirty heels in his boots. He hit him so hard that one hundred candles lit in my father's eyes.

My mother and we, five children, stayed in Mayaki. My mother rented an apartment. We had one big room and a kitchen. We fetched water from a well. There was a toilet outside. We also had a cellar to store food. Milk and other dairy products were kept in the cellar. Our mother had to cook meals every day since there were no fridges to keep it. The stove was stoked with cane. We had old furniture: a cupboard, a table and chairs, a trunk and a shabby wardrobe.

In 1914 my younger brother Grisha was born. My father served near Odessa and our mother visited him several times. In 1917 our brother Froim was born and in 1918 the youngest Mayor was born. He fell ill with scarlet fever and died.

In 1916 I went to a Russian elementary school. We studied grammar, arithmetic and Russian. My older brother Dodik also went to a Russian school. I had a friend at school. He was also a Jewish boy. In the afternoon I attended classes in cheder. We were taught to pray in Hebrew. My mother went to the synagogue regularly: she had a seat of her own there.

In 1916 a wealthy Jewish family whose sons were Zionists organized a team of Jewish young men. They read lectures and distributed books. They spoke Yiddish. They explained that Jews had to move to live in Palestine. Jews in Mayaki sympathized with these young people. That was how I got



to know who Zionists were.

My father returned home in 1918. In 1919 my mother died of pleurisy. My mother was buried in the Jewish cemetery and there was a Jewish funeral. There was no rabbi, though, since the rabbi from Mayaki and many other wealthy Jews moved abroad. I recited the Kaddish for eleven months.

By that time I had studied three years at school, Shyfra – four years and Dodik – five years. We didn't go to school after our mother died. Our father didn't remarry. Dodik and I began to help our father in his cabinetmaking shop, Shyfra was a housewife and Milia and Lyova went to school.

There were no pogroms in our area during the Civil War, but power switched from one side to another. At the end of the Civil War many units were fleeing from Odessa to Romania via Mayaki. I remember a Polish unit came to stay overnight. There was a rumor that they were going to slaughter all Jews. My father stood by the window with his rifle and Dodik and I were beside him. Dodik fell asleep late at night and I stayed shivering beside my father until morning. Nothing happened that night.

There was a famine and epidemic of typhoid in 1921. We were ill, but survived. This same year we moved to the village of Berezovka, Baltski district, for a short period of time. Probably, our father had a job there. We observed Jewish traditions. We spoke Yiddish with our father, but we communicated in Russian between ourselves and with friends.

I was helping my father. We made doors, window frames and repaired windows and doors. Dodik didn't quite like what we were doing and he went to work at a farming guild. Many young Jews were attracted by communist ideas and he joined the Komsomol [11](#) in 1922. I also submitted my application following my brother's example, but I had to wait for half a year until I turned 14. I gave up Jewish traditions after I joined the Komsomol.

### **The Great Terror and the Ukrainian Famine**

In 1924 my brother Dodik organized a Jewish kolkhoz [12](#) in Mayaki. My brother was already a communist and was unanimously elected chairman of this kolkhoz. Two years later the Jewish and Russian kolkhozes [13](#) merged. Dodik was chairman of this kolkhoz until the Great Patriotic War.

In 1927, during the period of the Trotsky case [14](#) I was accused of ties with Trotskists without any grounds. I was arrested during a football game; I was a big football fan. A militiaman approached me and asked me to follow him. He pointed at a person and asked me whether I knew him. I knew this man and gave a positive answer. The militiaman said he was a Trotskist.

Therefore, I was taken to a prison in Belyayevka where they opened a case against me. I had to come to interrogations, but I was glad they did not beat me. I had to sleep on the cement floor in my cell. They didn't even allow my father to send me warm clothes. I fell ill with pneumonia and was conveyed to a hospital where they applied cupping glasses.

I was supposed to stay in hospital, but my guard had an order to take me back to prison. We returned to prison. They were trying to convince me to sign some detractive papers, but I refused. I was ill for three months. I couldn't move and my arms were paralyzed. They released me after I gave them a written undertaking not to leave the place.

When I recovered I worked with my father in a frontier unit in Mayaki at the border with Romania. We worked there as carpenters. A year and half later, in 1929 I moved to Odessa where I lived with my cousin sister Milia. In Odessa I worked in military units, and in 1931 I went to work at the shipyard.

In 1932 I married Luba Sharghel from Mayaki. She was born into a Jewish family in 1909. Her parents observed all Jewish traditions. Her father was a baker and her mother was a housewife. They owned a bakery, but they weren't a wealthy family. I don't remember their names. Luba was my schoolmate. I met her when I was in the third grade and she was in the second grade. In 1931 Luba moved to Odessa. She lived with her aunt. We met again in Odessa and fell in love.

We had our wedding in my father's home in Mayaki. It was a Soviet wedding party since I was a Komsomol member. We invited friends and relatives. There was live music at the wedding - one of my friends played violin.

In Odessa we rented a small one-room apartment on Pishonovskaya Street. There was a small kitchen in the apartment. Luba was not a Komsomol member. She observed Jewish traditions. She made gefilte fish and chicken broth. In 1933 our son Roma was born. When he was eleven months old Roma fell ill with meningitis and died. We had a hard time then.

During the period of famine in 1933 [15](#) I was a crew leader in a carpenters' crew working at the construction of a big apartment house for plant employees. We received food coupons, food packages and 300 grams of bread for lunch. We were building a house at the corner of Havannaya and Lanjeronovskaya Street in the very center of the town. The turnkey construction lasted four years.

In 1935 our son Syoma was born. In 1938 Misha was born and in 1939 our son Tolik followed. We still lived in a one-room apartment. There was a wardrobe, beds, a small table and a few chairs in our room. There was also a pram and a cradle where Syoma and Misha slept. Tolik slept in the pram.

The children often fell ill. They contracted illnesses from one another. All three of them had scarlet fever and diphtheria. My wife was having a hard time looking after three children. Syoma went to kindergarten and Misha went to a nursery school.

In 1935 I went to work as a carpenter with a theatrical company. When the Finnish War [16](#) began in 1939 I received a subpoena to the military registry office. When they heard that I had three children they let me go home. Sometime later, however, I had to go to serve in a fire brigade. We lived in a barrack and did the job of firemen. I was there as long as the Finnish War lasted. When I returned home I resumed my work at the theatrical company.

My older brother Dodik, chairman of the kolkhoz in Mayaki, married Marusia, a Russian girl, in 1933. Their daughter's name was Luda. Our father was far from chauvinistic, but he didn't like Marusia. My older sister Shyfra married a Russian man, but my father respected her husband a lot. Shyfra's husband, Tima Sivak, was a nice man. He was born in Mayaki in 1903. He was a driver. They had three children: Vitia, Roma and Lusya.

My younger sister Milia also got married. Her husband's name was Grisha Dyogot. They had three children: Lyonia, Boria and Raya. Milia's husband was a Jew. He observed all Jewish traditions.



My younger brothers Lyova, Grisha and Froim moved to Odessa in 1935. They lived with me. Lyova and Grisha worked as carpenters at the theatrical company. Froim studied at the Euromol School on the corner of Bazarnaya and Kanatnaya Street in the center of the town and worked as a turner there. Lyova and Froim were single. Grisha was also a bachelor before the Great Patriotic War.

Our father continued working as a cabinetmaker in a frontier unit. He lived in our old apartment in Mayaki. In 1929 I helped him to buy a house in Mayaki. My father lived in this house with Shyfra's family. There were three rooms in the house: two bigger and one smaller room. There were old pieces of furniture. There was no place to buy furniture in the village. They stoked the stoves with coal and wood. They had a kitchen garden and kept poultry. We helped them with their kitchen garden.

We liked to visit our father. We went to the bank of the Dnestr, swam and lay in the sun. My father liked his grandchildren. He spoke Russian with them. Shyfra's children spoke Yiddish - my father taught them.

There was no anti-Semitism in Odessa before the Great Patriotic War. People were not ashamed of their names. There was no national segregation between Jews and Russians. My wife and I often went to the Jewish theater in Odessa. My father and sisters also went to the Jewish theater on Grecheskaya Street when they came to visit me. We liked performances with Liya Bugova acting. She worked in the Russian theater after the war. We watched 'A grois gevin' by Sholem Aleichem [17](#) and 'The Servant of Two Masters' by Carlo Goldoni [(1707-1793): Italian playwright].

### **During the War**

I remember very well how the radio broadcast announcing the beginning of the Great Patriotic War on 22nd June 1941. At 2 o'clock in the morning on 23rd June a courier delivered a subpoena to the military registry office to my home. I was to be at the registry office in the Water Engineering College the following morning. Three days later we went to a military camp at some location in Odessa region by a passenger train.

On 30th August our unit was formed and we went to the front line near Uman [Cherkassy region] on trucks. Our group stopped in a small forest by the side of the road before Uman. Fascists began to fire at us. Some of my comrades were wounded and some were killed. Intelligence officers of our military unit said they saw the general that was commander of our unit surrender to fascists.

We moved closer to the front line and took our position in a glen. A day later another commanding officer arrived and an intelligence officer reported the general's surrender to him. He couldn't believe it was true, but then all ten officers confirmed that it had happened right before their eyes. The commanding officer ordered us to change our positions and thus, we avoided many casualties. The traitor general knew our positions and soon German planes bombarded the glen.

I and a few other craftsmen were ordered to join a logistic unit in the army headquarters. A junior lieutenant ordered us to line up and began to ask questions: 'Are there any carpenters?' - I made a step forward and someone else did. 'Bricklayers? Roofers? Armorers?' In total he put together a group of ten craftsmen.

We crossed the Bug River. I was a joiner in a field engineering unit at the front under command of Budyonny. [Marshal Semyon Budyonny - one of the most famous Bolshevik Cavalry Commanders

of the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920. Budyonny was one of the first five Soviet Marshals, and one of only two of them, who survived Stalin's purges. In 1941-42 he was commanding officer of the southwestern and northern Caucasian directions]. He was appointed by Stalin, but he didn't last as a commander.

We were retreating to Novorossiysk [700 km from Odessa] where I joined Primorskaya army and stayed there until the end of the war in Northern Caucasus and then in the Crimea. I was wounded twice. For me the war ended in Simferopol in 1945. I was first sergeant.

During the Great Patriotic War I corresponded with my family. I knew that my father and my sisters with their children evacuated to Kazakhstan. I don't remember in what town they resided. Shyfra's son Roma died at the age of five in evacuation. After the war my father, Shyfra, Milia and the children returned to Mayaki, repaired the house and continued living there.

### **After the War**

My sisters' husbands returned home from the war. Milia's husband became an invalid after he was wounded at the front. My brother Lyova disappeared in 1941 and Froim died in hospital from his wounds in 1942. Dodik was released from army service as chairman of a kolkhoz, but being a communist he volunteered to the front. He worked in a hospital. Grisha participated in the defense of Odessa in 1941, in the village of Dalnik [near Odessa].

Grisha was wounded and captured by Romanians. He had a surgery in a hospital for prisoners-of-war. Some Jewish doctors, who were also prisoners, but worked in the hospital, got to know that Grisha was Jewish and gave him clothes, money and documents to escape to Balta [in Odessa region], where Grisha was in hiding for almost three years, living with Ukrainian families. He had documents under the Russian name of Samovalov. When Soviet troops liberated Balta he returned to Odessa and had documents with his real name issued anew.

I had no information about my wife or sons until 1945. When I came to Odessa after the war I got to know that my wife Luba and the children had perished. They were in Odessa ghetto, then they were sent to Berezovka and from there they walked to Kotovka farm. They were showered with cold water on the way - and it was winter - and tortured. In Kotovka farm policemen shot them. There are 92 people buried there, including my boys and my wife. There is a memorial plaque there, but I've never visited the site.

When I heard that my wife and my children had perished I didn't know how to overcome this sorrow. I went to my old apartment. There was another tenant there. He gave me money to buy a two-room apartment in a half-ruined house on Kuznechnaya Street in the center of the town. I restored this apartment and returned to my prewar job in the theatrical company.

One year later I met my uncle Motka's daughter Zina. In 1945 Zina and her two children returned to Odessa from evacuation. Zina's stepson Misha was 17. He was a cadet in a military boarding school. Her son Alfred was a small boy. We decided to get married in 1946. My father had no objections to our marriage. He knew Zina very well.

When Zina and I got married I treated Alfred like my own son, although I didn't formally adopt him. Zina was a housewife. Life was hard after the war. There was not enough food, but we managed. I didn't earn much. We couldn't buy any new clothes, but we managed with what we had. My father

lived with us.

My brother Grisha returned to Odessa and married a Jewish girl. His wife Zima worked in a state insurance company. Grisha worked with me in the theatrical company. They had a son named Lyonia. There were no jobs in Mayaki in the early 1950s and my sister Shyfra and her husband sold their house and bought half a house at the 7th station of the Bolshoi Fountain at the coastal area of the town. In 1957 my younger sister Milia's husband died from his wounds at the front. Milia also sold her house and moved to her daughter and her family in Odessa. All my relatives settled down in Odessa. We kept in touch.

I didn't support my relatives with any money since I had to provide for my own family, but since I was a carpenter and joiner I always helped them to repair their houses or apartments. We got together to celebrate birthdays and weddings, Soviet and Jewish holidays.

My father died in 1951. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery. It wasn't a Jewish funeral since it wasn't customary at that time, but I did recite Kaddish and sat shivah for seven days. After the war I went to the synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street and then switched to the synagogue in Peresyp.

There were demonstrations of routinely anti-Semitism after the war. Jews were abused in stores and in the streets. They called Jews 'unfinished' - rude. There was no abuse at work, though. We tried not to speak Yiddish at work, particularly in the presence of Russian employees. I had Russian friends. My Russian colleague was not anti-Semitic.

When we heard that Israel was founded in 1948 [18](#) we were very happy to have our own country. I read in a newspaper that Mrs. Golda Meir [19](#) had visited the USSR and Stalin gave her a friendly reception.

I remember well the period of the Doctors' Plot [20](#) in 1953. A female doctor from Moscow blamed Jewish doctors of their intention to poison Stalin. [Editor's note: Some historians insist that it was Stalin's own forgery in order to spread anti-Semitism.] I remember people saying that all Jews were going to be deported to Siberia like the Crimean Tatars [21](#) and we were very concerned about it. In 1953 Stalin died and every Soviet citizen was grieving after him. We believed in him and idolized him. I went into attacks for him during the Great Patriotic War shouting, 'For Stalin! For the Motherland!'

Life went on. I went to work and my stepson studied at school very successfully. He got all excellent marks. He didn't identify himself as a Jew at school. My wife's stepson Misha finished his military school and was sent to a fire brigade in Ufa. Later he returned to Odessa and worked at a spare part factory where he was galvanic manager. He married Shyfra's daughter Lusia. When their baby was born they lived with us for some time.

From 1955 to 1958 Alfred studied in the Railroad College. After finishing it in 1958 he was recruited to the army. He returned home in 1961. He went to work as a locomotive operator and began his studies in the evening department of the Technological College. In 1964 he married a Jewish girl named Ania. Their baby was born in 1965.

Zina and I decided to exchange our apartment on Kuznechnaya Street to Pushkinskaya Street since my wife wanted to live near her sister. We moved to an apartment on Pushkinskaya Street, near the railway station, in the center of the town in 1965.

In the 1960s I went to health centers and recreation places every year: twice in Kharkov, twice in a health center in Western Ukraine and a few times in Odessa. I turned 60 in 1968. I was of the retirement age then, but I continued to work.

Alfred had an infarction when he was a third-year student at the Technological College. This happened in 1967. He was not allowed to work at the railroad. I don't remember the name of this office. He worked there until 1975.

In the 1960s my brother Dodik had to submit a letter of resignation from his position as chairman of the kolkhoz since he didn't have any agricultural education. His replacement was a young agronomist. Dodik worked as assistant agronomist for some time, but later they sold their house in the village and were going to move to Odessa. They bought a house in Odessa, but Dodik was severely ill already. He died of cancer in 1970. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa. As a communist he was buried in a red casket. [Editor's note: In USSR sometimes people arranged the funeral in such a way.]

In the 1970s many Jews were moving to their historical motherland Israel. I sympathized with them. There was negative attitude towards those who decided to move. There was a common point of view that they received education here and it was not loyal of them to leave. Those who worked in an office or enterprise were fired immediately.

They also demanded to have their apartments repaired before leaving. There were terrible attitudes. I remember my colleagues saying, 'They got complete education here and now they leave.' I spoke my mind and said that if they had had a possibility the Russians would have moved as well. Actually, it was what happened. Once I talked with a taxi driver and he said that if they opened the border 90 percent of the Russians would leave the country. And that's what actually what happened later.

My stepson said seeing a relative leaving at the railway station, 'Look, Papa, they are Zionists, if it were for me I would shoot them all.' I argued with him explaining who Zionists were. I knew from my childhood that Zionists wanted all Jews to come to live in Palestine. Zionists were harmless. They didn't blast trains, and they didn't do any harm to communists, while the communist propaganda condemned Zionists. Communists said that Zionists were bandits.

In 1971 my wife Zina died. In 1974 Alfred's opinions changed so dramatically that he decided to move to Israel. He began to ask our relative to send him an invitation letter. In 1975 Alfred, his wife Ania and their two sons left for Israel at the invitation of our relative. I also had an invitation and was to go with them, but I didn't want my daughter-in-law to look after me. I told them I would stay to have a gravestone installed on my wife Zina's grave. I hoped to find a woman to go to Israel with together.

When Alfred was leaving his older son Alik was ten years old and his younger son Zhenia was one year and a half. They settled down in Nes Ziyvona, Israel. Alfred worked as a design engineer at a military plant and his wife worked as a medical nurse. Now they are pensioners. My older grandson Alik is a doctor. He is married and has three children: two girls and a boy. My younger grandson Zhenia is a lawyer.

After my grandson left I lived alone for a long time. There was a ban for departures to Israel after 1980, even though I had an invitation. I submitted my documents to obtain permission to leave several times, but each time I got an unmotivated refusal.

In 1987 my niece Raya, my sister Milia's daughter, introduced me to her colleague Octiabrina Kocherga. She worked at the shoe repair factory. We got married in 1988 and lived in my apartment. Octiabrina is a Jewish woman. She was born in Odessa in 1924. Her maiden name was Savchenko. She had a Jewish mother and a Ukrainian father. He died when Octiabrina was six years old.

Before the Great Patriotic War, Octiabrina finished a secondary school and a school of medical nurses. During the war Octiabrina was a medical nurse in a hospital at the 3rd Ukrainian Front. She demobilized in 1946 and returned to Odessa where she soon met a military that became her husband in 1948. He was Ukrainian. In 1949 their daughter Natasha was born and in 1953 their daughter Galia was born. In 1953 Octiabrina's husband perished in service. Octiabrina worked at the shoe repair factory raising her daughters.

In 1992 my sister Shyfra, her daughter Lusya, Lusya's husband Misha Shtein, my second wife's stepson, and Shyfra's granddaughter moved to Israel. Misha was 64 years old and lived on welfare until he began to receive his pension in Israel. Lusya worked as chief accountant in Odessa, but in Israel she had to accept a job as a cleaning woman. Shyfra lived with her daughter and received a pension. She died in 1998. Her granddaughter Valia got married. She works in an emigration agency and her husband Zhenia is a broker. Shyfra's son Vitia and his family lived in Odessa. He died recently.

My younger sister Milia followed my older sister. In the early 1990s her son Boria died in Odessa. He worked as a locomotive operator. Boria's wife Ida was a teacher. They had a daughter named Zoya. After her son died, Milia decided to move to Israel. She moved with her daughter Raya, her son Lyonia and their families in 1992. Her son worked as a galvanic operator in Odessa and got the same job in Israel. Her daughter cleans house entrances and looks after old people in Israel. Milia and her son Lyonia are pensioners.

I retired in 1993. In 1997 my younger brother Grisha who was severely ill, his son Lyonia, Lyonia's wife and their two sons moved to Los Angeles, USA. A month after they arrived there, Grisha died in hospital in Los Angeles. I have no relatives left in Odessa. My stepson Alfred keeps in touch with me.

I went to the wedding of my younger grandson Zhenia in Israel in 1994. I was there for one month. I liked it in Israel. Alfred lives in a three-room apartment on the first floor in a house in Nes Ziyvona. I went to a synagogue in Nes Ziyvona. I liked it there. The only thing I didn't like was that synagogues are opened only on Saturday in Israel. Another thing I didn't like there is that there are no clubs for older people to meet and socialize. Old people sometimes can talk in a garden. In Odessa old people meet and exchange news every day. I am religious. Even when I lived in Mayaki I went to the synagogue.

In 1992 the Jewish life in Odessa began to revive. The main synagogue was given back to the Jewish community. I go to the synagogue on Yevreyskaya Street. The synagogue on Yevreyskaya Street has been restored. It's a beautiful building. It's mainly attended by older people that come

to pray on weekdays. There are more visitors on Friday and Saturday, but on holidays it has even more visitors.

There were Jewish schools open and children from Jewish schools also come to the synagogue. My wife Octiabrina's grandson also goes to the Jewish school Or Sameach [22](#). They study prayers and Ivrit at school. On holidays they take part in concerts in the theater. We went to a concert. We also receive the Jewish newspapers Or Sameach and Shomrei Shabos in Russian and watch Jewish programs on TV.

The Jewish charity center Gmilus Hesed provides assistance to older Jews. A volunteer from this center visits Octiabrina and me regularly. We appreciate her help very much. She does our laundry, cleaning, the shopping and buys medications for us. In summer she takes my wife out and washes her in the bathroom.

My wife has two daughters, but she doesn't communicate with her older daughter and her younger daughter has had two surgeries. She has cancer. Therefore, we badly need help that this volunteer provides. She also brings food packages provided by Hesed. What I mean is that if it were not for the Jewish community and Gmilus Hesed we would not have been able to live to this old age. We are very grateful for their care and concern for us.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

### **2 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.



### **3 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.

### **4 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

### **5 Likbez**

'Likbez' is derived from the Russian term for 'eradication of illiteracy'. The program, in the framework of which courses were organized for illiterate adults to learn how to read and write, was launched in the 1920s. The students had classes in the evening several times a week for a year.

### **6 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.

### **7 Domanevka**

District town in Odessa region. Hundreds of thousands Jews were exterminated in the camp located in this town during the war.

### **8 German colonists/colony**

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

## **9 Odessa pogrom in 1905**

This was the severest pogrom in the history of the city; more than 300 Jews were killed and thousands of families were injured. Among the victims were over 50 members of the Jewish self-defense movement. Flats, shops and small enterprises were looted by the pogromists. The police stood by and did not defend the Jewish population.

## **10 Jewish self-defense movement**

In Russia Jews organized self-defense groups to protect the Jewish population and Jewish property from the rioting mobs in pogroms, which often occurred in compliance with the authorities and, at times, even at their instigation. During the pogroms of 1881-82 self-defense was organized spontaneously in different places. Following pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century, collective defense units were set up in the cities and towns of Belarus and Ukraine, which raised money and bought arms. The nucleus of the self-defense movement came from the Jewish labor parties and their military units, and it had a widespread following among the rest of the people. Organized defense groups are known to have existed in 42 cities.

## **11 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.

## **12 Jewish collective farms**

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

## **13 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.

## **14 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In

1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

## **15 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

## **16 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

## **17 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich) (1859-1916)**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

## **18 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took

the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

### **19 Golda Meir (1898-1978)**

Born in Kiev, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

### **20 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.

### **21 Forced deportation to Siberia**

Stalin introduced the deportation of certain people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

### **22 Or Sameach school in Odessa**

Founded in 1994, this was the first private Jewish school in the city after Ukraine became independent. The language of teaching is Russian, and Hebrew and Jewish traditions are also taught. The school consists of a co-educational primary school and a secondary school separate for boys and for girls. It has about 500 pupils every year.