

Arnold Fabrikant

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Nathalia Rezanova

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Arnold Fabrikant is a very lively old man. He speaks excitedly while looking into his partner's eyes inquisitively. He lives in a two-bedroom apartment of an old house on a quiet street in the historical center of Odessa. There is a collection of embroidery with flower patterns on the walls in the bigger room - this is the hobby of Arnold's wife Nathalia Yakovlevna, a sweet short woman. The apartment is modestly furnished. There are lace covers on the floor lamp, table and shelves, which make for a cozy old-fashioned atmosphere. The small room where we had our first interview serves as a study. There are piles of manuscript folders with newspaper and magazine press clippings, document files and video cassettes. There are many books in the house. The spouses are very friendly and amiable. Though Arnold is a very busy man, he willingly agreed to talk to me.



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Family background

My maternal grandfather, Arnold Bluvstein, was born somewhere in Austria in the 1860s. He got a legal education in Vienna, and a corn merchant millionaire, a Greek by the name of Anatra, brought him to Odessa in the 1880s. My grandfather worked as a legal adviser for him at his mill. Anatra valued my grandfather so much that when pogroms happened in Odessa, he provided security to guard his home and family. In 1900 grandfather Arnold, his wife Gitlia and two daughters rented a four- bedroom apartment on Kniazheskaya Street. I am now living in two rooms of this very same apartment.

My grandparents were wealthy, but lost everything after the October Revolution [see Russian Revolution of 1917] [1](#). My grandfather was ill and bound to bed when revolutionary navies came to his home and took away everything of value. Miraculously of all family jewelry a golden brooch in the form of a safety pin with a square head with a few small diamonds in it remained with them. This was my mother's favorite and only piece of jewelry. Grandfather Arnold died in 1920, before I

was born. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

My maternal grandmother, Gitlia Bluvstein, nee Kaplanskaya was born in Odessa in the 1860s. She had two brothers, Grigoriy and Yakov. Grigoriy Kaplanskiy, the older brother, was a popular lung-doctor. Before the Revolution he lived in Switzerland and they said he owned a health center there. He dealt in politics and came to Russia to 'do the revolution'. He didn't have a family. In the Soviet times Grigoriy was chief doctor in a town hospital in Odessa. He died in the middle of the 1930s. The other brother, Yakov Kaplanskiy, was born and lived in Odessa. He was an accountant. His wife Maria Kaplanskaya [nee Podrayskaya] was a professor at Odessa Conservatory. They had a son named Tolia. Yakov Kaplanskiy died in Odessa in the middle of the 1950s.

My grandmother told me that there were servants in the house, and during the Revolution a revolutionary navy was visiting their cook who was sleeping on the entresol. He had grenades and guns all over his body. He stayed with the cook overnight and everybody feared that those grenades would explode.

I remember my grandmother as a very thin and quiet woman, always busy with the housework. She cooked delicious food. I don't know where Grandmother Gitlia studied, but she had some education. She sometimes spoke Yiddish to my mother and she also knew Russian. I cannot say how religious Grandmother Gitlia was, but she always thoroughly prepared for Pesach and had special crockery for the holiday. She served festive food and bought matzah. She didn't go to the synagogue often. Once, when I was small, my grandmother took me to the synagogue to show me the place. My grandmother was very ill and we looked after her for many years. She died in 1939 and was buried near her husband. I don't know whether the Jewish ritual was observed. My grandparents had two daughters: Klara and Bronislava. Klara, the older one, died young before the Revolution, and Bronislava survived.

My mother, Bronislava Fabrikant, nee Bluvstein, was born in Odessa in 1896. After her parents had lost their older daughter they directed their attention on my mother. My mother finished a private grammar school. She loved theater since her childhood. The family often went to the opera and my mother, having a rather good voice, used to sing opera arias at home. In 1921 she entered Odessa Medical College, and in 1922 she got married.

My paternal grandfather, Naum Fabrikant, was born in the 1860s in Pinsk [today Belarus]. He received an elementary education. In the early 20th century my grandfather and his big family moved to the town of Voznesensk in Nikolaev region. He was a tailor and started his own business. The family legend says that he got the surname of Fabrikant, when he opened a garment store. Besides, my grandfather owned a wedding hall that he let on lease. I never met my grandfather Naum and that's all I know about him. My paternal grandmother Shifra Fabrikant - I don't know her maiden name - was a seamstress in the garment shop. My grandfather and grandmother died in Voznesensk before the Great Patriotic War [2](#). They had five children: three daughters and two sons, all born in Voznesensk.

My father's older brother, Shmilik, was born in 1888. He worked as a tailor in the family shop. In the early 1930s he arrived in Odessa and lived with us for some time before he married a woman named Genia. They received an apartment on Bariatievskiy Lane. Shmilik was a high-class fitter. He and his wife worked in the Odessa garment factory named after Vorovski [3](#). They had no children. They failed to evacuate during the Great Patriotic War. Shmilik was an invalid and was not

subject to army service. Their neighbors told us after the war that when at the beginning of the occupation Soviet counterintelligence blasted the building of the commandant's office on Marazliyeskaya Street, Romanians issued an order to execute civilians for perished Romanian soldiers. They captured anyone they saw, regardless of nationality and hung them. Shmilik and Genia were among the captured and hanged.

My father's sister Klara was born in 1900. In her youth, Klara moved to Odessa. She married Grigoriy Gorodetskiy, a Jew. He was an accountant. In 1922 their daughter Nina was born. During the war the family evacuated to Central Asia and then returned to Odessa. Klara's husband passed away shortly after the war. Aunt Klara worked as administrator in the 'Krasnaya' [Red] hotel. My parents didn't keep in touch with this part of the family for some reason. All I know is that Nina finished a medical college and became a doctor. Aunt Klara died in Odessa in 1960 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

My father's sister Yekaterina was born in 1906. After she finished school my father brought her to Odessa. She lived in our family till she married Nathan Slepoy, a Jew. Her husband was a militia officer in Vapnyarka [near Odessa]. Their son Vilia was born in 1932 and their daughter Sveta [Svetlana] in 1936. Shortly before the war Nathan got a transfer to the Regional Prosecutor's office, and the family moved to Odessa. I remember that he had additional earnings by lecturing on espionage at enterprises. He had lots of brochures on this subject that I liked looking through. Aunt Yekaterina was a housewife. During the Great Patriotic War the family evacuated to Tashkent where Nathan had a high-level position as Prosecutor of the Republic. Upon their return to Odessa he was appointed chief of the investigation department of the Regional Prosecutor's office.

Vilia was fond of sports and finished the Faculty of Physical Education of Odessa Pedagogical College. He worked as a teacher of physical education at the medical school. He got married and had a son. Sveta finished a medical college and became an obstetrician. She got married and had a son. Nathan Slepoy died in 1980. In 1982 my aunt Yekaterina, her children and their families moved to Australia. She died in Melbourne in 2000. Her children and grandchildren are in business. They have their own houses. We correspond with them.

My father's sister Yevgenia was born in 1902. She married Yakov Bogomolskiy, a Jew. He was a cobbler and she was a housewife. Their daughter Nina was born in 1922. During the war the family evacuated to Tashkent and after the war they returned to Odessa. Nina graduated from the Philological Faculty of Odessa University and married Yefim Patlazhan. They had a daughter named Lena. Upon graduation from the Historical Faculty of Odessa University he defended his candidate of sciences dissertation and then a doctor's one [see Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [4](#), and was appointed chief of department in the Ivano-Frankovsk Pedagogical College. Nina worked there as a school teacher. Aunt Yevgenia and her husband moved to their daughter in Ivano-Frankovsk. She died there in 1990. Nina's daughter Lena and her husband moved to Germany in the late 1990s.

My father, Yefim Fabrikant, was born in Voznesensk in 1892. He studied in a grammar school. During World War I he was mobilized to the army where he was a hospital attendant. After the Revolution he joined the Red Army. He was doing well there and they sent him to study at Odessa Medical College. My father was lip-tight and didn't like to discuss his feelings, not even with the family, particularly regarding his past. All I know is that after finishing college my father stayed to work at the department with a popular Odessa physician, Buchstub. My father was his favorite

student. When he was a student, my father was renting a room in my mother's parents' apartment, and that's where he met my mother.

My parents had their civil marriage in 1922 and lived with grandmother Gitlia. I was born in Odessa on 1st January 1923. When I was small, my father's sister Yekaterina, who was living with us at the time, was my nanny. Later I was taken to a teacher of the Froebel Institute [5](#), who lived a block away from our house. She taught me and a few other children music. There was nothing interesting about it and we could hardly endure it.

Growing up

I learned to read before I started school in 1931. My parents consulted their acquaintances for a long time till they chose the best school #37 [6](#), though it was not that close to where we lived, on 24 Korolenko Street. My parents gave me money to buy tickets for transportation, but keeping it a secret from them I instead sat on a buffer of tram #1 that almost took me to school. I was doing well at school, though I didn't have all excellent marks. I had many friends. We, boys, were fond of [James] Fenimore Cooper [(1789-1851): American novelist] and Alexandre Dumas [(1802-1870): French novelist and dramatist], and we played characters from their books. We had our coats of arms, swords and tomahawks and fought like musketeers and Indians. There were groups of children in each district. It happened so, that in my groups there were professors' children: Nadia Mayevskaya, Alla Gurchenko, Seryozha Avksentiev, I also had another friend: Anatoliy Irbin, a very smart guy. He moved to Kiev after finishing the 7th grade.

We didn't like some teachers, for example, Ksenia Ivanovna, nicknamed 'Ksendza'. We played ugly tricks on her as best we could. On the other hand, our physics teacher Anatoliy, whose patronymic I don't remember, was a very good man, on the contrary. We all looked for tricky questions in popular magazines to ask him. When he didn't know the answer, he said, 'Kids, I don't know, I shall look it up at home and explain it next time.' He did give us an explanation, but we already had another bunch of questions ready for him. However, we knew physics brilliantly.

We had an interesting Ukrainian teacher, a gorgeous big man with a round head. He translated Beranger [Beranger, Pierre Jean de (1780-1857): French poet] into Ukrainian and used to recite these poems to us in our classes, and at the end of each class he promptly gave us the homework. In the next class he asked us for ten minutes and then started reciting poems again.

We liked our geography teacher, Yelizaveta Konstantinovna Dikoina, so much that our whole class went to her birthday parties - 25 of us. We kept this tradition even after she went to lecture at university. After she died we visited her children. There are few of us left. This year only seven of us were there.

We hated the German language and didn't know it at all. Our teacher was a short German man who murmured something through his nose. Our teacher of mathematics was Pavel Ivanovich, an invalid of World War I: he had lost his leg, was short and old with a moustache yellow from smoking. He got angry with poor pupils and knocked on the table with his stick, exclaiming, 'You, dummy, you know nothing!' There were no demonstrations of anti-Semitism at school.

My mother worked as a cardiologist in two recreation centers in Odessa: Chkalov and one by the NKVD [7](#) named after Dzerzhinsky [8](#). There we got a room for the whole summer at the seashore

and we lived by the sea. I remember my mother always complaining that she was made to provide political information for nurses and attendants in the centers. She learned the history of the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks [since 1952 Communist Party of the Soviet Union] in the evening, read newspapers and made notes. Since my mother had a very serious attitude toward her work, she had very little free time left. My mother loved to have guests. She sang well and had a pleasant voice. She knew all arias from 'Eugene Onegin' [opera by Tchaikovsky, based on Pushkin's novel of the same name]. My parents had friends - representatives of the medical professorship of various nationalities. My father sometimes did private practice: he received patients at recommendations of his friends.

During the war

The arrests of 1937 [during the so-called Great Terror] [9](#) had no impact on my parents. They never discussed this subject with me. None of their acquaintances suffered either. Two families were arrested in our house. In 1938 Strazhesko, the greatest physician at the time invited my father to Kiev. In Kiev my father was awarded the title of professor. My mother and I stayed in Odessa, but I often visited my father in Kiev. We exchanged two rooms of the existing four rooms for Kiev so that my father had a place to live there. My father's friend in Kiev was another notable professor whose name I don't remember. He was arrested all of a sudden. My father went to the inquest body to give his guarantee that this professor was innocent. And strangely enough, they listened to him, and released his friend. My father and I visited him shortly afterward. This professor, a philatelist, gave me an album with stamps and I contracted from him the passion for collecting stamps for the rest of my life.

During any military campaign initiated in the USSR, my father was immediately taken to the army. He took part in the operations for the annexation of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine [see Annexation of Eastern Poland] [10](#), and Moldova [11](#) to the USSR and took part in the Finnish War [12](#). He was in the rank of colonel and had the position of chief physician of the army.

On 18th June 1941 we had a prom at school, and on 22nd June I was supposed to go to Kiev to enter a college. There were disputes in the family: I wanted to study script writing since I had liked writing in my childhood, and attended a literature club in the House of Pioneers [also see All-Union pioneer organization] [13](#), while my parents thought this was no good and wanted me to become an engineer. They chose Kiev Aviation College for me. My train was to depart in the evening, but my father called at 6 in the morning. We were the only family with a telephone: there were only few telephones at that time. All my father said was: 'Don't send Nolia [affectionate for Arnold] away. I cannot tell you why. Let him give back his ticket and stay at home.' At 10 o'clock in the morning I went to return my ticket to the railroad cashier box on Karl Marx Street. When I left, I saw a crowd gathering around a street radio. I stopped and listened to Molotov's [14](#) speech about the beginning of the Great Patriotic War.

My father was mobilized on the very first day of war. He was in the army troops defending Kiev. They were retreating to the town of Pyryatin where the headquarters of the Western Front got in encirclement and its commander perished. The survivors, including my father, found shelter in a deep ravine, but the Germans discovered and encircled them too. My father and a few other officers shot themselves to escape captivity. The witnesses, doctors, who had been captured then, told my mother and me about it. The Germans made them work for them as doctors and they

managed to survive. We received a notification that my father 'was missing'. I have no official confirmation of my father's death. After the war and later I made inquiries at the Department of Medicine in Moscow, but they responded that Yefim Fabrikant 'was missing' and that they had no further information about him.

The recreation center where my mother worked was modified into a hospital on the first days of the war and my mother was staying there day and night. I went to excavate trenches, reinforce the basements, and glued paper strips on the windows to prevent glass from breaking during air raids. There were actually no air raids, but there were tracer bullets flying at night. Sometimes I went to see Nadia Mayevskaya who was my friend then. We went out on the balcony and saw flak cannons shooting.

On 3rd July the guys I knew began to receive subpoenas to the army. I also received one. On 22nd July, the day of the first bombing of Odessa, we, recruits, were gathered in a port club, lined up in columns at about 4pm and marched to the port. Our parents were seeing us off. I took with me what was included in the list of the military office: a spoon, a pot, a pair of underwear, a towel, soap and a toothbrush. I also had a few books on military subjects that I had bought on the first days of the war in a bookstore on Deribasovskaya Street. As it turned out later, they were for at least an army commander or commander of a division, and I threw them away.

In the port we boarded the 'Fabritsius' ship, which remained in the port till 8 in the evening. There was the 'Profintern' cruiser nearby that was supposed to escort ships from Odessa. All of a sudden German bombers began to drop bombs around us. I remember no particular fear. We just watched as it was happening. We saw bombs exploding on Primorskiy Boulevard. It happened so that I saw a bomb hitting the house of my future wife Nathalia Yampolskaya on 7 Gogol Street. Her father was at work and she and her mother were visiting their friends who were ill, but her mother's sister Mila and their housemaid were in the apartment at the time and perished. All their belongings were destroyed by fire. Natasha's father worked in the regional health department where they were provided with a few white robes, some hospital sheets and tickets for evacuation since they had nowhere to live.

The 'Fabritsius' with probably 200 of us aboard reached Kherson in one night. In Kherson we boarded another ship, a small one, and sailed up the Dnieper at night anchoring at daytime to not reveal our whereabouts. We had patriotic spirits: we were to fight and struggle. We reached Dnepropetrovsk where I was enlisted in the 56th artillery equestrian regiment. We got washed, changed into uniforms, packed our civilian clothes into rucksacks and handed them in for storage, and they told us, 'When it's time for you to demobilize, you will get them back'. They gave us scrapers and we went to clean horses. It was fearful - a mare kicking with her hind legs - I was afraid of getting closer. Our first sergeant was an uneducated man - one could tell he came from a village. We lined up in the evening and he said, 'I don't care that you have education! You will wash the mares' tails!' For several days we were cleaning the stables, and unloading barges in the port. Then we were sent to excavate trenches and tank ditches. Finally, though they had never trained us to shoot with rifles, they gave us rifles and sent us to the trenches in the direction of Dnepropetrovsk.

We never saw one German military in those trenches. We heard machine gun shooting, and bullets whining, and we looked out of the trenches, but didn't see anybody. We were ordered, 'Shoot

there!' and we were shooting there. It hardly made any sense, all of this. Some and I saw this with my own eyes, attached a white towel to their bayonets and ran across the field to surrender! Our commanding officer told us they were deserters and we had to shoot them, but nobody was shooting at them. We were young boys, we didn't understand anything and besides, nobody had trained us how to shoot.

On 20th August we were gathered and ordered to march across Dnepropetrovsk to the rear. We marched throughout the night and in the morning we came to a forest. We didn't get any food or water during our march. There was a corn-field nearby. We baked corn and this was our food. Our officers, and we sensed this, didn't know what to do. At night we were ordered to get ready to leave. When we had gone quite far away, we saw that our camp was bombed: Germans somehow got to know that we had been there. We were retreating. At Lozovaya station we boarded a freight train heading south.

In Mariupol we were allowed to get off the train to exercise a little. We received a package of rationed food for the first time, and it was rather strange: herring and pork fat and this was all, no bread. At the railway station I met an acquaintance from Odessa. He said my mother was there in a train, but I didn't have time to go look for her. I was glad to know she had been able to evacuate. My mother and I had made an agreement back in Odessa that I would write to her acquaintance in Zlatoust in the Ural who would resend my letters to my mother.

I received the first letter from my mother this way at the end of December 1941. She wrote that she had left with her Uncle Yakov Kaplanskiy's family. When professors of the conservatory were to evacuate his wife Maria obtained a ticket for my mother and for aunt Bella, the former wife of my mother's cousin brother Roman Bluvstein, at my mother's request. He had left his wife before the war, and my mother, who liked Bella, decided to take care of her. Bella lived in our apartment and, naturally, my mother couldn't leave her behind. Roman stayed in Odessa and perished during the occupation of Odessa. My mother, Bella and Yakov's family lived in the town of Dzhahal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, for some time. My mother went to work in a hospital. Uncle Yakov's family moved to Tashkent, as his wife got a job offer from the conservatory in Tashkent. Their son Tolia finished a tank school in Tashkent, went to the front and perished.

My military train arrived in the village of Abinskaya [town of Abinsk, Russia, since 1963]. We were accommodated on the football field of the stadium. There we were acquainted with Stalin's order to recall young men with secondary and incomplete higher education to send them to officers' schools. We were sorted out and I happened to be in the group that was sent to the town of Piatigorsk where the 68th separate Navy shooting brigade was being formed. I was enlisted in a mortar unit of a bombardment company of 50-mm mortars. This mortar has the shape of a big frog. It couldn't be disassembled, it was to be carried on the shoulder and it weighed twelve kilos. We also had to carry boxes with mines - eight mines weighing 800 grams each in one box. Our commanding officer was also carrying boxes with mines; we all did. Our unit consisted of five people: the commanding officer, three mine deliverers and a gun layer. I happened to be a gun layer. We began to learn the mortar discipline. The company deployed at the Mashu?k Mountain. [Editor's note: the Mashuck is a rather low mountain (993 m) near Pyatigorsk. It is known in Russian history as the place of the duel and death of the great poet Lermontov [15](#).] Winter started and we began to learn how to ski. We skied up to the hill where Lermontov had had a duel. Then we either skied, if we managed, or rolled down the hill.

In late December 1941 our brigade was sent to Rostov. There were 50 percent experienced navies there and the rest were inexperienced youngsters like me. The officers were former sailors. The commanding officer of the brigade was a submariner, who had only a vague idea about land operations. He didn't even care to train us to entrench and we had many problems due to this later on. At Bataysk station near Rostov, where our train stopped, somebody got to know that there was an echelon with spirit nearby. We took canvas buckets from which we gave water to the horses to get spirit that we drank. This happened to be poisonous technical spirit and many died from poisoning. I didn't drink at that time, and this saved my life. We went patrolling in Rostov, guarded the general staff of the regiment and dug trenches near Rostov.

We were in reserve of the 56th army till March 1942, when we were ordered to re-deploy. We marched at night, slept in stables or sheds or just on manure since it was warm. We reached the village of Kolesnikovo on the banks of the Mius River, 12-15 meters wide, but rather deep, up to 8-9 meters. It was covered with ice at the time. There were flood-lands in spring and farther there were hills where the Germans were in trenches. There was Hill 101 in front of us, the highest and the most important one, shielding the direction to Donbass [Donetsk].

The commander of the Southern Front, Budyonnyi, decided to make the Soviet people happy before 8th March, Women's Day. There was a tradition to have accomplishments coincide with holidays before the war, and they transferred this practice on military actions without giving it a second thought. They decided to attack and capture this Hill 101 on 1st March, the town of Matveyev Kurgan, Taganrog and approach the German grouping from the rear, from the sea. On 7th March we were ordered to start the attack. The artillery failed to catch up with us and there was no artillery preparation. We crossed the Mius River over the ice before dawn, came onto a field and began to move ahead slowly in a chain. The first was the infantry line, rifling units followed and our company with mortars was moving about 200 meters behind. We were about 400 meters from the slope of the hill, when the Germans started shooting. They hadn't seen us before since it was still dark. We didn't wear camouflage: officers wore sheepskin jackets, soldiers had their overcoats on and sailors in their black overcoats made perfect targets on the field covered with snow. Like many others I didn't have high boots, but ankle-high boots with leg-wrappings. The Germans fired mines at us and then started firing from machine guns. Later I got to know that in this battle the average density of rifle-machine gun firing was 10 bullets per each linear meter of the front line per minute. So we were moving through this wall of firing.

There was a small village - just a few houses at the bottom of the hill. We identified a machine gun nest and cannon by the houses and eliminated it with mortars. When we began to climb the hill, a sanitary instructor and two attendants were walking beside me. The attendants were taking the wounded down the hill. The sanitary instructor was wounded, and the commanding officer of my company ordered me to take his bag. At this instant a splinter of a shell hit my mortar and damaged it. The commanding officer ordered me to drop it and apply bandages on the wounded. There were many wounded, so I applied bandages while they were also helping each other. We managed to almost climb to the top, to the German communication passages. In a trench nearby a mine exploded and the splinters wounded my legs. The blood was coming through my leg wrappings. They applied a bandage and evacuated me down the hill to the houses. We were waiting for wagons from the sanitary company there. The Germans trapped us in mortar firing. I was shell-shocked. I started bleeding from my ears, nose, throat, and my teeth came loose. I

almost fainted, but I survived. We were taken to the medical company on horse- drawn wagons. From there I was sent to a hospital in Rostov.

While in hospital I got to know that our troops failed to capture Hill 101 since the Germans used tanks and planes in their defense. Over half of the staff of our brigade perished then. There were 4,400 of us, and only about 2,000 survived. I stayed in hospital for a long time. I had blood transfusions and salt solution injections since I had lost a lot of blood. I was staying in bed and there were two rubber tubes with syringes on the ends through which the medication was injected into my legs, and they got swollen. I had a big problem with my teeth: my front teeth were loose and I had some metal splints installed to strengthen the gum, but the effect was very poor - my gum began to bleed and they had to remove the splints and my teeth never got stronger. When I got better, something happened due to which I almost got to the tribunal. The thing is there was a radio plate hanging right above me and it was always turned on. The noise drove me nuts. On the first day, when I managed to get out of bed, I just grabbed it and took it off the wall. The political officer came by and considered what I had done as a harmful and political act. I hardly managed to get rid of him.

When I recovered I rejoined my brigade. This happened in late April 1942, it was already warm. On my way I stayed overnight at some trans- shipment point. There were tents on a hill and two U2 planes nearby. There were girls from the medical battalion of our brigade in the tents. They were singing, 'Sweetheart, will you hear me,' with such lament that this song is imprinted in my memory. After the war I was trying to ask the women from our brigade at our veterans' meetings: Who sang this song then? But I never found those girls. Finally I got to my battalion and from there I was sent to be first sergeant in the battery of 120mm mortars. I got an intelligence unit in my command and received a stereo telescope. I was to sit at the observation point looking for targets and reporting to the commanding officer, who identified the coordinates, range, angle and other data. I had a stereo telescope throughout the war; when one broke down in a battle I got a new one.

We happened to be in defense at this same Hill 101, but behind the hill there was some smoke appearing every day. We discovered that this smoke was shooting. It turned out that the Germans were sending an armor train from Taganrog and it was firing periodically. We fixed it finally and covered it with our firing and it didn't reappear. In general it was quiet and the Germans left us alone. We lived in earth huts. There was no wood and we thought of heating the huts in the following way: we took a brick soaked in gasoline, burned it in an iron cast pot and it burned for a while heating the hut. We lit the earth hut with a makeshift lamp from flattened out shells. We made a hole on the side to pour in kerosene. We inserted a piece of cloth torn off our overcoats to serve as a wick in its narrow part. These lamps emitted lots of smoke, but served their purpose.

We were fed well: millet porridge, sometimes we got meat, and 150 grams of vodka every night, officially, but it was always more actually. It was believed to be a normal thing to cheat on the rear unit. Every day it was necessary to submit a report for meals for a specific number of people, because sometimes the deceased remained on the lists and their food rations were received and shared among the others. Officers received additional food rations. I was first lieutenant and received cookies, sugar and tobacco additionally.

Soldiers were given makhorka tobacco. We made 'goat leg' cigarettes from newspapers pieces. There weren't many matches and we lit cigarettes with fire steel. We borrowed cotton wool and

manganese from nurses, absorbed cotton wool in manganese solution and dried it out. When a piece of such cotton wool was placed on the fire steel, the sparkle lit it instantly and then we lit cigarettes from it. At first I didn't drink or smoke and used to exchange my vodka for sugar, but I was freezing in the trench. The others smoked and had a drink and seemed to feel better. So I also began to drink my ration of vodka and smoke, and it became easier to endure the damp trench, but it was still cold.

We had warm flannel underwear: a shirt and underpants and a uniform shirt and trousers over them. We wore sailor caps at first, but later we got winter hats and wore knitted headpieces underneath. We also had sheepskin liners to wear underneath our winter coats; they warmed us well. The boots with leg-wrappings that I wore till 1943 didn't help against the cold. Those wrappings were a problem to me. You drop the end of a two-meter long belt, it rolls away and you have to crawl around looking for it and then roll it up again - a terrible nuisance. In our pastime everybody told stories. Older soldiers told fables of their frontline love adventures. Everybody boasted as much as he could. We often read letters from home aloud - everybody was interested what was going on in the rear.

When the Germans forced a crossing over the Don River and approached Stalingrad, we got the order to retreat in the direction of Rostov. We had to cover about 60-80 kilometers. The Germans were following us. A few kilometers away trenches had been dug for us and we had hardly managed to get there, when German tanks started to attack us. All of a sudden a pack of dogs with triton blocks attached to their backs ran past us. There was a starting lever sticking from their belts - they hitched the bottom of a tank to this lever and the tank exploded. Of 40 tanks 30 exploded, and the rest of them left. It turned out that there was a company of tank fighters behind us. The female trainers fed their dogs only under an operating tank and developed a trained reflex in them. We felt sorry for the animals, but what could be done about it, at least the attack was repelled.

When we came to Rostov to cross the Don, I saw an incredible scenario: vehicles, horses, wagons, tractors, combines, people, and cattle were moving along two crossing ways continuously bombed by Germans. They didn't just drop bombs, but shot through empty barrels whining so loudly that each barrel seemed to be falling on you. You press yourself to the earth to hide away, hear something falling nearby and wait for an explosion, but nothing happens. The main crossing was on a pontoon bridge. Everybody stepping on it began to run fast. There were bombs exploding on the right and on the left, raising fountains of water; some people fell into the water - a terrible sight. Somehow we managed to do the crossing.

On the opposite bank, walking a few kilometers in the direction of Bataysk, we took a defense position. My observation point was on the roof of a house in the nearest village. I was doing observation of the locality and at dawn I saw Germans marching in a row in a ravine from Bataysk. I reported to my commander of the battery about this and he reported to higher officers. At this time the Germans bumped into our outposts and exchange of fire began. Half an hour later a group of Germans on ten motorcycles arrived. There were two machine guns on each motorcycle. Our resistance didn't make sense any longer and we were ordered to retreat. Where to? The only possibility was to head to the flood-lands, and there were reeds, sedge and waist deep water. I was making my way through the reeds with my stereo telescope. All of a sudden I felt something hitting my arm. I dropped the telescope and somebody picked it. There was blood all over my hand; the bullet injured a tendon between my big thumb and forefinger. It was a trifling wound and under

different circumstances I wouldn't have needed to go to hospital, but I had it bandaged in the water, probably with dirty bandages that caused festering. I had a lot of trouble with it for about a month and a half. We were retreating. Finally, I was sent to a hospital near Tbilisi [today Georgia]. They promptly treated my hand and from there they sent me to an artillery instrumental intelligence school in the town of Manglisi near Tbilisi.

This was a division of the Makhachkala town military infantry school training geodesists and survey engineers, i.e., those who could picture a location layout with theodolite and find orientation with the help of a stereo telescope. When I finished it in the middle of September 1943 I was sent to the front line in the 55th guard division, 66th guard rifling regiment under the command of Glavatskiy from Odessa. Our division was to head to the Taman peninsula [Western Caucasus between the Azov and Black Seas] to the Strait of Kerch [connecting the Black and Azov Seas]. There are many lakes, swamps, reeds and canals there. The firth Kyzyltysh [one of the numerous firths of the Azov Sea] was separated from the sea by a split where we were to land to cut a retreat for Germans. We landed successfully; the Germans didn't notice us and began to retreat along the split, when they bumped into us. During a battle something went wrong with the radio holding communications with the army headquarters. Then a plane dropped a message from the commander of the army, Petrov, for us: 'We don't know where you are. Make an identification sign on your front line.' We made a line from pieces of white cloth, whatever we had at hand, to show them the location we were at. We held the Germans back and stayed there quietly till late October.

On 4th November we were put ashore across from Chushka, a split at the end of the Taman peninsula; this area was called Malaya Zemlia. I stayed with the artillery on the main land. I began to send data about the targets and did it well. I don't know how I did it: we had learned calculations, but here intuition was more important. Our troops captured a part of the Kerch peninsula, but the Germans had a well fortified defense line and they stopped us after we had covered about twelve kilometers of the Kerch peninsula. Despite this we were in good spirits probably thanks to political work. There was a political officer in each company whose only mission was to trigger discussions telling us what we were to do and how, what we were fighting for and whom we were fighting - this wasn't a mere formality and it had its effect on soldiers, lifting their spirits and uniting them. We went into battles with the words 'For Stalin, for the motherland, straight on!' Of course, there were deserters. Once, when we were remanning, our brigade was ordered to line up in a U-order and two individuals were demonstratively shot for desertion. Once, additional staff of Azerbaijani arrived. They didn't know Russian and didn't want to fight whatsoever. They ate some herb on purpose, it caused diarrhea, and it was terrible and everybody wanted to get rid of them. They were sent to a medical sanitary battalion and I don't know what happened to them then. They never returned to us.

I took part in a landing operation. On the evening of 9th January we went into the Azov Sea. We had the so-called anti-yperit high boots. At night, all of a sudden a storm broke and our boats, long boats and schooners were scattered all around. Half of the landing troop disappeared, some drowned and some were dragged into the sea; they were found two weeks later. I fell into the water, my stereo telescope got wet and I got wet in the chest-deep water, the temperature of which was only four or five degrees. What saved us was that the seashore wasn't far away and the water was shallow. When I reached the seashore, the commanding officer yelled, 'Drop your stereo telescope, grab a machine gun - there are Germans moving along the shore, we have nobody to

shoot back at them!' I grabbed a machine gun and joined the others. We managed to repel the attack. In this battle Nadia Leschina, Glavatskiy's wife, who served there with us, demonstrated heroism. Mariners were fighting with us and Germans sent tanks to where they were, and the mariners began to retreat. Nadia all of a sudden got to her feet and shouted, 'Guys, follow me! Go ahead!' The mariners felt ashamed that they got scared and the woman was not and they repelled this tank attack. For this battle Nadia was awarded an Order of the Combat Red Banner [16](#).

In those days I was thinking of joining the Party. I talked to Zakharov, the Party leader of our regiment. He talked me out of it, 'If you join the Party, they will send you to the hottest spot and you will perish for nothing. You are important for us and we need you to be here with us rather than somebody else.' Our division moved to the village of Varenikovskaya to relocate to a different front. There were many troops, tents, cannons, and lots of people taken to this railroad junction. All of a sudden somebody noticed a hare running from God knows where. Everybody went after this hare trying to throw an overcoat onto him. The hare escaped. It was a lot of fun, especially when an army newspaper wrote that the glorious 55th guard rifling division failed to catch a single hare.

Then we fought at the 1st Belarusian Front. I participated in the famous Bagration operation. [Editor's note: Belarus operation of the Soviet army in the summer of 1944. The invasion force consisted of 1,700,000 troops supported by 6,000 planes, nearly 3,000 tanks, and 24,000 artillery pieces. This attack cost the Germans more men and material than the defeat at Stalingrad.] Then we came to Brest and moved onto the territory of Poland. After Warsaw was taken, the advance was suspended. That was when I thought: We are advancing the war is coming to an end, it's time to think about peaceful life. During the war I actively corresponded with girls like everybody else. We often received letters at the front from girls, with photographs in them: 'I would like to meet a young soldier.' The girls didn't know any name and address at first, of course. All the action was organized by the military. I had a whole collection of photographs of different girls signed on the backside: 'May this still-imprint remind you of a living soul,' or 'don't think about me, when you look at the photo, but think - and then look!' There was one girl from the Far East, but this wasn't what I was thinking about. I wrote to the girl in Odessa whom I liked, but there was no response.

From Poland we returned to Belarus and then moved to Lithuania. Our division was one of the first to cross the border of Prussia and come to German land. [Eastern Prussia was bordering with Lithuania before the war. After the annexation of the Baltic States (1940) it became a German-Soviet border. After the war Eastern Prussia was divided up in between the Soviet Union and Poland.] At the border, there was a post with a sign reading 'Here it is - the fascist Germany!' Of course, that Europe was radically different from where we came from. I compared the houses in Prussia with the ones we had seen in Belarus. I even took a picture of one house in Prussia, so well-designed it was. When we entered Germany, we were allowed to send trophies home. Everybody looked for something to send home. I sent my mother a gown, fabric, some pieces of cloth. There were many abandoned houses. Our soldiers were particularly eager to get watches. Sometimes they would stop a German man asking, 'Uhr, Uhr [German for 'watch'] take it off!' I had about 16 watches. There was a popular saying: 'let's make an exchange without looking!' to swap watches. The watches were a kind of luxury in the USSR. Some didn't care about trophies and others were greedy - one could tell what people were like.

During the war relations between people were the same as in peaceful times. If a person was bad, he was not liked. We sensed what a bad commander was like when somebody named Alexandrov

replaced our commanding officer, Glavatskiy. Everything changed in the regiment. Alexandrov had stayed in the rear forming marching companies, but at the end of the war there was no more need in doing this and he was appointed regiment commanding officer. He came to Prussia with his wife, but he turned out to be such a womanizer that he had several lovers. His wife made a scandal every day. We were allowed to lodge in apartments and my orderly found me one about one and a half kilometers from where our military unit was deployed. All of a sudden there was alarm every night. This Alexandrov had nothing to do in the evenings after the scandals with his wife, but raise alarms. Every night I had to jump out of my bed to run to the unit - this was painful! Everybody cursed him, and I still recall him with disgust.

At about the same time a woman doctor came to our regiment. Her name was Valia; I don't remember her surname. We all recall her with warmth. She was a dentist technician. She was a big fat woman. There were no trousers of her size, so she wore a long skirt. She had many patients, but no anesthetics. For anesthetization she would lie down on the patient with her big bust - this was her method. For a long time, and this made her different from other women, looking for men at the front, Valia was alone. Then she finally fell in love with the battalion commanding officer Petrus. One night they were making love in an earth hut and she began to groan loudly. The Germans heard it and started firing. This was the front line. Later there was an investigation: 'Who screamed? Why?' But we didn't give her away and the case was eventually dismissed.

In 1944 I got a letter from my mother from Odessa. She had returned home, but there were other people staying in our apartment. Before she managed to have them move out by a court's decision she lived in a small storeroom in the conservatory that Maria Podraskaya helped her with. Then one room became available in our apartment and my mother moved in there. Everything was gone - our mahogany furniture, my grandfather's pieces, valuables. My mother only discovered a copper mortar and a bookshelf at our neighbors'. She bought a black plastic upholstery divan, when she received her first salary. She was assistant chief of the cardiology department of the Lermontov health center, headed by Professor Zhigalov, one of the most famous cardiologists in Odessa then.

In Eastern Prussia the Commander of the Western and 3rd Belarussian Front, Army general Ivan Cherniakhovskiy issued the only order throughout wartime: 'Save people!' Commanding officers were brought to trial for violation of the order for unjustified casualties. I had a good friend called Kostia Brovin, commanding officer of a rifling company, an accountant in peaceful life. A smart reserved guy, we had many common interests. A soldier from Kostia's group of combat security disappeared. Whether Germans kidnapped him or he surrendered - nobody could tell, but he had disappeared and that was a fact, and Kostia was brought to the tribunal because he was a commander, and sent to a penal battalion. [Penal battalions were subdivisions of the Soviet Army to which people were sent for punishment during the war. They were used at the most dangerous frontlines, basically sent to certain death]. He perished in the first battle. General Cherniakhovskiy was mortally wounded in Eastern Prussia in 1945. This was the most annoying thing: to perish at the end of the war.

On 13th January 1945 we got an order to attack, when we were not ready for it whatsoever. It turned out later that the Germans beat down the ally troops in Belgium and they asked Stalin to help them. [The last significant German counter-attack took place on 5th January 1945 in the Ardennes. It was not successful and the Germans were gradually retreating afterwards.] To save the situation we were made to attack, when we didn't have sufficient stocks of shells, when there

were many wounded people and when no additional troops had been sent. It was hard to break through the German defense near Königsberg. We couldn't avert the artillery firing of the Germans and had many injured people. When their artillery firing began, somebody shouted in the trenches, 'Hold on, Vanyka, it's beginning!'

By late March 1945, after hard battles in Eastern Prussia, we were sent to the rear for remanning and we thought the war was over for us. Our echelon reached the town of Lida in Belarus. We went to sleep and in the morning, when we woke up, it turned out we were moving across Poland. What happened was that we were transferred to the 1st Ukrainian Front moving to Berlin. On 22nd April we started our first battle near Zossen - the location of the underground headquarters of Hitler's land troops. After the battle we started looking for interesting trophies. I took a map of Berlin from the wall and I still have it.

In April we entered Potsdam and joined in the most horrible action - street fighting. I was in infantry troops since there was no artillery used in these operations, just machine guns and grenades. On 30th April 1945 we began our attack on the railway station, and this was also the Charlottenburg metro station in Berlin. This was a three-storied reinforced concrete building with big windows and doors. There was a big square in front of the building with a low steel fence with one entrance way. There was no other way and we had to send people through this small entrance, but German snipers were killing them one after the other. I requested artillery troops to somehow blacken the square with smoke and they did it. We rushed to the first floor, but couldn't even look out of there - the Germans were shooting and throwing grenades from the second floor. Then I did my most heroic deed during wartime: I requested artillery firing to my coordinates. The artillery troops started firing to the second floor - they killed the Germans, but we survived. We went around the station - there was nobody left!

We moved on. There were connecting underground passages in Berlin through a whole block - from one corner to another. There were a few steel doors leading to the basements. I tried to open one and heard a shot. I drew back in time - somebody shot from down there. If it hadn't been for the steel door, there would have been nothing left of me. On 1st May there was another dangerous moment. It happened in the basement of a house. When we arrived there we saw many people and then somebody fired a gun and the bullet went through my cap. We began to search people and one of them, a thin German guy, had a gun in his pocket. This was the only person throughout the war whom I was sure I killed. I also captured another soldier wearing a German uniform in this basement, but he happened to be a Vlasov [17](#) soldier. He was wounded and we left him in the basement till morning. In the morning we found him hanged on a beam on his own belt in a sitting position. Nobody felt sorry for him. We had a bad attitude toward Vlasov soldiers.

On 2nd May, at 12 o'clock, Berlin surrendered. The war was over for us. On this day I wrote to my mother after a long interval - since December 1944. I had thought to myself that I had survived for a long time and that I would probably be killed and that she had better get used to the thought that there was no me. So I lived through the last months of the war with this attitude, but then there was a turning point in my heart and I believed that everything would end well for me. After Berlin surrendered, our unit marched in the direction of Prague in Czechoslovakia. We were at the border of Czechoslovakia, when the war was over. At night we got to a mine field and our unit had to walk step by step to avoid the mines, when all of a sudden we heard shooting somewhere in the rear. We turned our heads and saw tracer bullets flying by. This was a sign that the war was over. This

happened at midnight, on 8th May.

Post-war

We camped near the town of Ceska Lipa. We had a quiet, peaceful life there. We had artillery training nearby, where we actually just fooled around drinking beer. It was very inexpensive. The Czechs treated us well and shared food with us. We went to a bar where they gave us a barrel of beer, we went to the field, deployed the battery and ate and drank and then we returned with an empty barrel. We were allowed to take trophies from the Germans, but there was a special order issued that forbid us to take anything from the Czechs. We were bored and organized a dancing and singing group. We had a good accordion player and dancers. I sang and was the leader of the group. We rested in this manner till late May, when we got an order to march back home across Poland. There were other units moving back home. We, infantry, hardly had any trophies with us, but the others had bicycles, vehicles and even rode in coaches. However, there were special units deployed at our border. They checked and requisitioned everything. I brought home watches and stamps: I had found a few albums with stamps and taken them. A friend of mine brought a Telefunken [German firm] radio with him.

Till spring 1946 I continued my service in Grodno in Belarus, and in April I came to Odessa on leave. A fellow comrade, who was much older than me, went on leave with me. He was so determined to get married promptly that on the first evening, when we went for a walk on the boulevard he met a girl and they got married three days later. Six months later she gave birth to a baby, but he was such a duffer that it never occurred to him that he had married a pregnant woman.

I came to Odessa to meet with my future wife Natasha Yampolskaya. We had known each other since childhood. We studied in the same school where she was a Komsomol [18](#) leader, only she lived in a different district. Our parents were acquainted and had friendly relations before the war. Nathalia was born in Odessa in 1920. Her father, Yevgeniy Yampolskiy, was born into the family of an inn-owner in Odessa in 1891. He studied economics in Paris. Returning to Odessa, he worked in a bank. After the revolution he worked as an accountant in an insurance office, before the war he worked in the town health department and after the war he worked in the regional health department. His sister, Yekaterina Yampolskaya, was a revolutionary: in 1918 she worked in Lenin's secretarial office; she knew him personally. She was married to the chief editor of the Pravda newspaper [The paper of the Communist Party of the USSR]. She was arrested in 1937 as the wife of an 'enemy of the people' [19](#). She was kept in camps for 20 years, released in 1957 and rehabilitated later [see Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union] [20](#). She received an apartment in Moscow. My wife's mother, Olga Khariton, was born in Odessa in 1896. She was a housewife.

The Yampolskiy family was in evacuation in Stavropol [today Russia] and then in Stalinabad, in Tajikistan. In evacuation Nathalia studied three years at medical college. The Yampolskiy family was miserably poor after returning from the evacuation. They were allowed to live in the medical college, in a small room near the bacteriological laboratory in which they were breeding guinea pigs and where the smell was disgusting.

After demobilization I finally returned to Odessa in September 1946. Admission to colleges was over and I entered the spirit department of the Food Industry Technical School. When I finished it Nathalia was working on her mandatory job assignment [21](#) in a small mining town near

Voroshylivgrad. When I was a last-year student I did my practical training at the vodka factory in Voroshylivgrad. We registered our marriage on the eve of 1st May 1948 and had a 'mayovka' wedding out of town with her friends. [Editor's note: The word mayovka is derived from the name of the month May when people organized picnics with family and friends. Schoolchildren, students and adults used to arrange such outings enjoying the food and drink.] We had a record player. My factory gave me ten liters of raw alcohol. We drank this alcohol, sang, danced and had lots of fun: we were young and full of hopes. Then I went back to defend my diploma and got a job assignment to the vodka factory in Odessa. Nathalia's father, who was working in the regional health department, pulled the strings for her to get a job in Odessa.

In 1949 our daughter Yelena was born. We lived with my mother. We installed a partition in her room to make a small room for ourselves. We were poor. Nathalia had makeshift shoes with a wooden sole. I wore my military uniform overcoat. I entered the Odessa College of Food Industry. I bought my first coat and a hat, when I received money for the development of a rum production line. Here is how it happened. During the war, when there was lack of sugar in the country, Stalin issued an order to organize a new zone of sugar production in Kazakhstan. They purchased sugar canes and established selection points, but the cane didn't grow. It only grew in one spot in the south of Uzbekistan and there were huge crops growing on about 400 hectares. They decided to process it to rum and addressed the Odessa College of Food Industry for help. I went home via Moscow where I bought a gray coat and a green hat in the GUM [abbreviation of Gosudarstvennyy Universalnyy Magazin, meaning State General Store] in Moscow. I also brought a few cuts of staple from Uzbekistan. My mother, wife and daughter had dresses made from this fabric. After finishing college I went to work in the Odessa liqueur and vodka factory.

I was quite indifferent when I heard about Stalin's death [in 1953]. I heard the news on the radio when I went to work in the morning. I knew that he was ill and there had been announcements that he was better and then worse and it was clear that he would die. I had seen so many deaths that one more or one less didn't matter... I wasn't critical about Stalin, but I didn't sympathize with him either. My mother believed in Stalin. She always kept a newspaper issued on the day of Stalin's death, with all the praises in his address. When the denunciation of Stalin's cult began, my mother didn't believe it. She said, 'How could this be?' She was and stayed loyal to Stalin till the end of her life. The Doctors' Plot [22](#) had no impact on her. My mother died in 1963. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery, next to Grandmother Gitlia.

My daughter went to school #101 in 1956. Though Yelena studied well, her teacher literally bullied her for nobody knew what reason. She was probably an anti-Semite. My wife and I were very wrong to not take our child to another school. We tried to talk to this teacher, but it didn't help. So our daughter suffered till she went to the fourth grade where they had different teachers and the situation improved, but this had its impact on her. In 1964 after finishing school she wanted to enter medical college, but I understood that being a Jew she had no chances there. I lectured part-time at the College of Food and Refrigeration Industry and decided to somehow help her to enter it. Though they knew me well in college and the rector knew me too, they had her flunk rudely at the exam. I went to the rector and made a scandal and then Lena [Yelena] took another exam and was admitted.

Though state anti-Semitism developed during the rule of Khrushchev [23](#), I held this man in high respect. He could be excused for many things for his denunciation of the cult at the Twentieth

Party Congress [24](#). My wife and I often go to Moscow and visit her aunt Yekaterina Yampolskaya's grave in the Novodevichie cemetery [the Moscow cemetery where many famous Russians are buried]. And every time we go there we see fresh flowers on the grave of Khrushchev. On holidays and weekdays, in summer and winter people remember that he has done good. He released so many people. It's a different matter that he lacked education and culture.

I've never faced any anti-Semitism of a personal character. I am this kind of a person, who has had many friends and most of them were Russians. However, I did face it from state authorities. For example, in 1967, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Soviet power, the liqueur and vodka factory where I was working had to nominate two employees for the award of 'Honored Innovator of Ukraine'. There were two nominees: I and Ivan Dymchenko, a Ukrainian man. I had more innovative developments, but he was awarded the title and everybody knew why.

By the way, women appreciated one innovative proposal I made. There was a place for washing glass containers outside and women sitting by the conveyor in winter suffered from the cold a lot. I thought 'how do we warm them up?' And I figured we had to warm them up from beneath. We placed heaters so that they supplied heated air under their skirts and women stopped complaining about the cold in winter. For many years I consulted the liqueur and vodka factory in Varna, Bulgaria. They requested my approval of all technical issues. I provided numerous consultations to them, but I, a Jew and not a Party member, was never invited to the cruise ship to Varna on 9th September, the day of the liberation of Varna. Not one single time! Only in 1976, after a big scandal with the officials did I manage to travel to Bulgaria for two weeks.

In the 1960s and 1970s, during the Brezhnev [25](#) regime, there were numerous thefts at the liqueur and vodka factory. I was chief of the steam and power maintenance department at the factory. This was a responsible position and the department was often inspected by state authorities: power inspection, records inspection, maintenance, boiler, trade union audits, and sanitary inspection. We had to bribe all inspectors. They particularly came before holidays and each of them was to be given a bottle of alcohol or there would be problems. I went to the shop superintendents asking them for bottles of alcohol. Finally the director of the factory ordered them to supply the products to me for this purpose. But those people were stealing and had cars and dachas [summer houses], whereas I received a salary of 240 rubles. For additional earnings I worked part-time at the college starting in 1965, and did extra work preparing diploma theses and course theses for students. We bought our first TV set and furniture with the extra money I made this way.

My daughter Yelena finished college in 1969 and went to work as an engineer at the Avtogenmach plant where she worked for 25 years. In 1973 Yelena married Yefim Filurov. He is a hydraulic engineer. He worked as chief designer at the design office of the Yanvarskogo Vosstaniya plant developing hydraulic systems for unique load lifting cranes. They have no children. My daughter doesn't identify herself as a Jew. She is a believer, but she thinks that there is one God and there is one integral faith. She belongs to the Baptist community. There is a house in Odessa where she goes to pray.

In the 1980s regular meetings of veterans of the 68th Navy brigade began. In Odessa we keep in touch with Nadia Leschina who had raised the sailors in attack. In 1983 we took her to Matveyev Kurgan where Hill 101 used to be. A monument to the deceased land troopers of our brigade has been erected there. In the village of Kabardinskaya there is a museum dedicated to our brigade.

We also traveled across the routes of our brigade in Lithuania and Belarus. These trips were organized by Party organs and administration of these areas as their propagandistic activities. Using the materials of these meetings and having worked with documents from archives I wrote a book about our brigade. At my request the veterans sent me their memorials. I realized there was nobody else to do this job and everything might have been forgotten. I need to give due to the Soviet times, saying that veterans were honored then. They were given awards annually on Victory Day [26](#) and other memorial dates.

In 1983, when I turned 60 [pension age], my colleagues in college and at the factory, relatives and veterans collected money and bought me a present: a camera and all accessories required for filmmaking. I even got angry then: who needs it? I had long forgotten the dream of my youth to become a script writer. Then I heard that the Odessa Palace of Students had formed a group of amateur filmmakers. My wife and I began to attend it. Our first experiments were successful and soon we began to shoot films regularly. We shot about 50 amateur films on different subjects: the history of Odessa, the story of our family, the Russian monuments of architecture. We were awarded prizes and diplomas at town and all-Union contests. Of course, I wouldn't have managed to accomplish this without my wife's help. She is a really creative person.

Nathalia worked at the department of organization of health care in the Medical College at first, but she found this job boring. She finished a course of rontgenologists and worked as a rontgenologist in the Jewish hospital, one of the oldest hospitals in town, built on the contributions of the Jewish community before the revolution, till she retired. She was a very good specialist, published her articles in the 'Rontgenology' magazine, but she didn't want to defend a thesis and remained a practicing doctor.

My wife and I were friends with Tolia Irbin, my schoolmate, for many years. During the war he was in intelligence. He worked as a servant in a cathedral in Finland collecting necessary information. After the war Tolia finished Kiev Pedagogical College and worked as head of the chief publishing house of political literature. We visited him in Kiev and he came to see us in Odessa. I regularly made reports about my scientific activities in the Imont society in the house of scientists. Imont is the abbreviation for Institute of Methodology, Education, Science and Technical Equipment. Its chairman was Igor Zelinskiy, a scientist, former rector of the university, and a respectable man. We were friends with him. My wife and I took part in all events organized by this institute.

I was satisfied with the results of perestroika [27](#). I personally don't criticize Gorbachev [28](#). I liked him. He was the youngest and most cultured and intelligent man of all Soviet leaders. I didn't feel ashamed when he represented our country abroad. His wife, Raisa Maximovna, held herself with dignity. Gorbachev did a great thing. He had the courage to do what nobody would dare to do. It is my opinion that the Soviet Union should have fallen apart a long time before. In my opinion Ukraine has to be independent. This is a rich country and it can manage by itself.

In the 1990s many of our friends moved to Israel, but neither my wife and I, nor our daughter or her husband, had any desire to emigrate. Besides, my daughter's friends wrote that they weren't doing very well there. Many of them still feel sorry that they have moved there. I think that the state of Israel was initially organized in a wrong way. The UN made this mistake. They shouldn't have created the state where the narrowest area is 16 kilometers wide. This strip can be fired through by a mortar. Israel was right to start fighting for land with Palestinians, because they

cannot live like that.

There is no anti-Semitism, routinely or on state-level, as there used to be in the past. I know it. The Jewish life in Odessa is also very diverse. My interests are tied to the activities of Gemilut Hesed [29](#). There is a 'Front line brotherhood' group working there and I'm part of it. My wife and I go to concerts and often show our films there. We also receive charity assistance from Gemilut Hesed: monthly parcels and 30 hrivna once every quarter for medications. But the most important thing is that we can find our spiritual interests there. Nobody in our family can speak the Yiddish language and we've never observed Jewish traditions or celebrated Jewish holidays. I am an atheist and believe in human intelligence. I keep shooting amateur films. My wife and I are interested in all aspects of modern life: we read a lot and have many creative plans that we hope to carry out some day.

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 World War I, 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](#) Vorovskiy, Vatslav Vatslavovich (1871-1923)

a Soviet Party and state activist, publicist and one of the first Soviet diplomats. Grandson of a Polish noble man, son of a successful railway engineer, Vorovskiy was an intellectual rather than a typical Soviet revolutionary. In 1915 he emigrated to Sweden and was the representative of Soviet Russia in Scandinavia. Vorovskiy was killed in Lausanne, Switzerland, by a White officer; his death caused severance of all diplomatic relations between USSR and Switzerland for 25 years.

[4](#) Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate

degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

5 Froebel Institute

F. W. A. Froebel (1783-1852), German educational theorist, developed the idea of raising children in kindergartens. In Russia the Froebel training institutions functioned from 1872-1917. The three-year training was intended for tutors of children in families and kindergartens.

6 School #

Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

7 NKVD

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

8 Dzerzhinskiy, Felix (1876-1926)

Polish communist and head of the Soviet secret police. After the Revolution of 1917 he was appointed by Lenin to organise a force to combat internal political threats, and he set up the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police. Lenin gave the organization huge powers to combat the opposition during the Russian Civil War. At the end of the Civil War, the Cheka was changed into the GPU (State Political Directorate) a section of the NKVD, but this did not diminish Dzerzhinskiy's power: from 1921-24 he was Minister of Interior, head of the Cheka and later the KGB, Minister for Communications and head of the Russian Council of National Economy.

9 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.

10 Annexation of Eastern Poland

According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the

Belarusian Soviet Republics.

11 Moldova

Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River and the Black Sea, also a contemporary state, bordering with Romania and Ukraine. Moldova was first mentioned after the end of the Mongol invasion in 14th century scripts as Eastern marquisate of the Hungarian Kingdom. For a long time, the Principality of Moldova was tributary of either Poland or Hungary until the Ottoman Empire took possession of it in 1512. The Sultans ruled Moldova indirectly by appointing the Prince of Moldova to govern the vassal principality. These were Moldovan boyars until the early 18th century and Greek (Phanariot) ones after. In 1812 Tsar Alexander I occupied the eastern part of Moldova (between the Prut and the Dniester river and the Black Sea) and attached it to its Empire under the name of Bessarabia. In 1859 the remaining part of Moldova merged with Wallachia. In 1862 the new country was called Romania, which was finally internationally recognized at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Bessarabia united with Romania after World War I, and was recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic gained independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is now called Moldovan Republic (Republica Moldova).

12 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.

13 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

14 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.

15 Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841)

Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanting and bored nobleman. The

novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

16 Order of the Combat Red Banner

Established in 1924, it was awarded for bravery and courage in the defense of the Homeland.

17 Vlasov military

Members of the voluntary military formations of former Russian prisoners of war that fought on the German side during World War II. They were led by the former Soviet general, A. Vlasov, hence their name.

18 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

19 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

20 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.

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.

22 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.

23 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.

24 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.

25 Brezhnev, Leonid, Ilyich (1906-82) Soviet leader

He joined the Communist Party in 1931 and rose steadily in its hierarchy, becoming a secretary of the party's central committee in 1952. In 1957, as protégé of Khrushchev, he became a member of the presidium (later politburo) of the central committee. He was chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, or titular head of state. Following Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, which Brezhnev helped to engineer, he was named first secretary of the Communist Party. Although sharing power with Kosygin, Brezhnev emerged as the chief figure in Soviet politics. In 1968, in support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine,' asserting that the USSR could intervene in the domestic affairs of any Soviet bloc nation if communist rule was threatened. While maintaining a tight rein in Eastern Europe, he favored closer relations with the Western powers, and he helped bring about a détente with the United States. In 1977 he assumed the presidency of the USSR. Under Gorbachev, Brezhnev's regime was criticized for its corruption and failed economic policies.

26 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

27 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

28 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

29 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.