Makhlia Khalzova

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Lvov
Ukraine
Interviewer: Ella Orlikova
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We, I and Alla, the older daughter of Makhlia Khalzova, who accompanies me, are climbing up a spiral staircase to the second floor. We find ourselves in a tiny and very cozy and clean apartment. We are getting a hospitable reception. Makhlia treats us to delicious chicken neck stuffed with nuts and mushrooms. Makhlia is very pleased about a possibility to tell the story of her life. Her daughter Alla takes an active part in our interview adding details to her mother's story. Makhlia has no education. She cannot read or write, takes no interest in political events and doesn't watch TV. However, she has a vivid memory and expressive speech habits. She speaks a mixture of Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, Yiddish and some Hungarian, I guess. She used a mixed language with words from several languages while the main language she speaks is Russian. Since she has no education it's hard to say that she really speaks another foreign language. She is the embodiment of solid philosophy and wisdom of life.

Family background

My father's family came from Lvov, an industrial and cultural center at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. It had a population of 300,000 people: about one third was Polish and about the same number Ukrainian and the rest of the population was Jewish, Romanian, gypsy and Moldavian. Jews resided in the central neighborhood of Lvov. They were involved in trades and crafts. There were poor and rich Jewish families. There were several synagogues, cheders and yeshivot. Lvov belonged to Poland until 1939 and life there was quiet and wealthy.

My paternal grandparents were born in Lvov some time around 1850. My father's mother Laya Ostrover inherited from her father a jewelry store in the center of the town. She was the head of the family. She was a fat arrogant woman with a strong character. She had no education, but she was good at counting and could always take advantage of her skills. Her husband Leib Ostrover was about 10 years older than my grandmother. He was a Hasid 1. He wore payes and never cut

his beard. He was far from his wife's business life. He spent days praying, or having long discussions on religious subjects with other Hasidim. My father was a small boy - he only remembered that several Hasidim came to see his father.

My grandparents spoke Yiddish in the family and observed Jewish traditions. However, if business required working on Saturday or other Jewish holidays Laya did what she had to believing that God would forgive her. My grandmother's store was in the same house where they lived. There are still such houses in Lvov that are called 'Polish' since they were built for Polish lords. My grandparents' big dark apartment was luxuriously furnished and decorated with mirrors and carpets. There were housemaids from poor Jewish families. On Saturday and Jewish holidays Ukrainian girls came to do the housework. They were a wealthy and well-known family in Lvov and I saw the house where they lived, but I don't know any details about their life.

My grandparents had two children: a daughter Golda and my father Yoino. Since my grandmother had no education herself she didn't find it necessary to give education to her children. She thought that the melamed that came to teach the children Yiddish and Hebrew was sufficient. She believed that making money was more important in life than any education and that reading books was a sheer waste of time. Laya found a match for her daughter Golda to marry through a shadkhan. Her husband was a rich merchant of Guild I 2 from Moscow. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah in Lvov. A rabbi from Moscow came to the wedding. After the wedding Golda, who for some reason changed her name on her wedding to Genia, moved to her husband in Moscow and I have no more information about them. After my grandfather died before World War I Laya moved to her daughter in Moscow. In 1918 Lvov and Kosov, where my father lived later, were located beyond Russia and the families couldn't be in touch. In 1940 the Soviet troops came to the towns and my father tried to find his family, but failed. In June 1941 the Great Patriotic War 3 began. I never saw these people.

My father was born in Lvov in 1873. He got Jewish elementary education at home. An old melamed from cheder taught him. He wore a yarmulka. From the day he came of age my father wore a wide-brimmed hat, a typical hat worn by Hasidim, and payes and grew a beard. My father learned to play the flute and horn and could sing Jewish songs very well. My grandmother Laya hoped that her son would take over her business in due time, but my father took more interest in books and music. However, he had to obey his mother and he got involved in business, though unwillingly. My grandmother also wanted my father to marry a Jewish girl from a wealthy family, but she couldn't find a decent fiancée for him.

My mother Leya Schwarg, if my memory doesn't fail me this was her name before marriage, was born in the town of Bobrka near Lvov in 1877. Her mother died when my mother was two years old and her father Sender Schwarg died of typhoid when she was twelve. My mother remembered that her father owned a small store, but she couldn't remember what kind of goods he was selling. They were a poor family and lived in a small lopsided house in Bobrka.

My mother's older sister Esther was born in 1872. She was 17 when their parents died. She probably couldn't provide for my mother and my mother had to go to work as a nanny for a Ukrainian family. Esther married a Jewish man, who was visiting his relatives in Bobrka, a worker from Lvov, and they had three daughters: Zocia, Lyusia and Lisa, and a son - Stanislav. Stanislav became an actor in the Jewish theater in Lvov. Esther died from a disease in early 1930. Her

husband lived with Stanislav and was a sceneshifter in the Jewish theater. His daughters were married and lived in Lvov with their families. They all perished during the Great Patriotic War in Yanovski camp 4.

My mother told me that she even was a laborer in a church for some time before she came to work for a Ukrainian family. My mother said that this family treated her nicely. She lived with them for several years. [Editor's note: Makhlia cannot explain how a Jewish girl came to serve in a Ukrainian family when it was more common that Jewish girls worked for Jewish families.] She did the hardest work in the house and lived in a storeroom and the family wasn't interested in her outlooks. My mother was smart and she learned to read and write from teachers that came to teach the Ukrainian children. She also had some knowledge of French and German. She was eager to study and always stayed in the room during classes. She ate what she was given and during Jewish holidays she was allowed to go to Jewish families that observed the kashrut and Jewish traditions.

When my father was 22 he went to the small town of Bobrka on business. Ant there he met this 17-year old Jewish girl who worked as a nanny for a wealthy Ukrainian family: my mother. She was very pretty and my father liked her a lot. My father knew that his mother would never give her consent to this marriage since the girl came from a poor family and had no dowry. My father kept visiting her in secret. He arranged for a wedding to be conducted by a local rabbi. He needed money for the wedding, which he took from his mother without telling her. My parents had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. When my father brought his wife home his mother just said, 'You've married her - now live with her where you want and how you want'. She disinherited her son and never again took any interest in him and his family. My grandmother was the head of the family and grandfather didn't have a say.

In 1894 my mother and father settled down in the village of Pistyn near Kosov, 150 kilometers from Lvov. [Editor's note: Pistyn village was located on the bank of Pistynka River, a tributary of the Prut]. The native population of the village, the Hutsuls [an ethnic group of Ukrainian people living in the Carpathian Mountains] and Jews lived side by side peacefully and their cultures intertwined with one another. Hasid songs and folk dances have tunes and patterns similar to hutsul 'kolomyika' tunes [a quick duple-time Polish dance].

My parents rented a house in Pistyn. They never had a house of their own since they were a poor family. They rented a typical house for that area: it was a big wooden house with two verandahs, a kitchen in the yard in a separate building, a kitchen garden and a well. My father paid the rent of 50 rubles per month. My father worked at the wood cutting facility that became a factory on a later date in the town of Sniatyn, 20 kilometers from Pistyn, where he rented an apartment with other workers. There were ten to twelve workers in a room without any comforts. They slept on plank beds. They worked from 7am till 7pm. My father got very tired.

Growing up

The owner of the factory was a religious Jewish man and his employees were mostly Jews. They didn't work on Saturday or Jewish holidays. My father stayed in Sniatyn on weekdays, but came home on Friday evening and brought us little gifts and herring that we all liked. My father washed himself after he came home and put on clean clothes to start the celebration of Sabbath. My father said a blessing to the children and Holy Saturday, and my mother lit candles and said a prayer over them. My mother made a festive dinner: stuffed chicken neck, chicken broth and potato pancakes.

After dinner my parents sang Jewish songs. We, children, loved this time of warmth and coziness. Ukrainian women came to stoke the stove on Saturday. My parents never even struck a match. We went to the synagogue with our parents on Saturday, where my parents prayed. I used to sit beside my mother. I asked her, 'Jews were the first people, weren't they, Mother?' and she replied, 'That's right, girl. Jews have no land of their own now, but it will be different in the future. There will be a frightening time, but there will be a time when there will be only Jews on Earth and there will be one king. The Lord has sent Moses to save the people and Moses will complete his mission'. That was what my mother told me. There were no guests invited for Sabbath dinner, we had no relatives and our neighbors didn't often come to see us. We ate and rested. There was only our family. My parents took a rest on Saturday.

The first girl in the family, Olia, born in 1897, died when she was two years old, but I don't know what caused her death. My parents said she was a very pretty girl. The next child Khaya, born in 1904, finished the local grammar school for Jewish and Ukrainian children. Khaya became a dressmaker. She married Zeilek, a Jewish man and they moved to Kalush near the town of Stanislav [Ivano-Frankovsk at present], 200 kilometers from our village. They had two sons: Shleima and Pasyu. Khaya's husband was a communist and was involved in the underground movement. He struggled for the Soviet power in Western Ukraine. He had heart problems. When the Germans came in 1941 he died of a heart attack on that very day, I guess, it was an infarct. Khaya buried him and decided to get to the town of Stry where her husband's friends lived. All we found out from their neighbors was that they had to go through a forest that they entered and disappeared.

My brother Alter, born in 1908, came of age at 13. He prayed with his tallit and tefillin on and observed all Jewish traditions strictly. He finished the local school and became a very good tailor. He worked at a shop in Kosov owned by a Jew. He was handsome and intelligent. Alter brought home pictures of Lenin and Stalin and was hopeful for a better life. Alter looked forward to the time when Soviet troops came into town in 1939.

My second brother Idlei, born in 1912, was handicapped: his left arm and leg were underdeveloped. Our father taught him at home after work when he could. Idlei was a very kind and loving boy.

I was born in 1914. I was called Makhlia in the family. Shortly after I was born World War I began and my father was recruited to the army. He had his payes cut. He was a horn player in the troops of the Dual Monarchy. I remember my father coming back home from the war in 1917. My mother kept crying waiting for him. She asked me, 'Makhlia, will Father be back from the war?' and I replied 'Mother, my father has dropped his stick - I meant his horn - and is coming home to us. He will bring us challah'. I spoke Yiddish and didn't have enough words in my vocabulary to express my thoughts, but my mother understood and began to kiss me. Father returned home on that very day. He brought home tinned horsemeat and two small loaves of brown bread. The bread was so hard that my mother wondered how my father could have eaten it - she always baked delicious bread. 'I ate what they gave me', my father replied. When he saw me he exclaimed, 'God, you've grown big!' I hugged and kissed him. I didn't remember him since he went to the war shortly after I was born. I sat on his lap and said 'Dad, show me your teeth. I hope you haven't lost any blowing your horn'. I remember how happy I was to see him. My father was glad to be eating kosher food again, observe Jewish traditions and go to the synagogue. He couldn't do this when in the army. I don't remember whether he told us anything about the war.

My father went back to work at the wood cutting factory. Then, in 1919, my younger sister Itta was born. She was everybody's favorite. She studied well at grammar school. When the Soviet power was established in 1939 Itta went to work as a clerk at the fire department in Kosov.

My mother was a great cook. She bred chickens and took them to the shochet that lived near the synagogue. She only cooked chickens slaughtered by the shochet. Beef became kosher meat only after it was checked by the rabbi. My mother made chicken broth and meat balls from beef. Sometimes she added kolble and sometimes dumplings into chicken broth. On Friday mother made challah. She plaited them very skillfully like no one else. She also made 'Magdeburg pudding' from ground potatoes and she baked pies with nuts and honey and strudels with apples. My mother also made lokshen, very thin noodles. My mother cooked in ceramic pots on a wood stoked stove with an oven that had a tin lid. We ate food with wooden spoons.

We had special fancy dishes and utensils for Pesach. My father made fire to kosher all kitchen utensils and if something went wrong he burned that piece. The rabbi gave his permission to us to keep cereals and the rest of the leftovers were also burnt. I remember only two days in the middle of Pesach when it was allowed to do some work. I remember our family sitting at the table at Pesach. My father gave each of us a piece of matzah with jam and nuts on it and another piece with horseradish. Then he said a prayer standing. My mother put on a dark shawl and lit candles. We sat down for a meal and my father sang songs. It was beautiful. [Editor's note: this is what Makhlia remembered, although it is common knowledge that women do not light candles at seder and wear light colored shawls.]

Father made a sukkah at Sukkot. He made it from planks and we had meals there. Our Jewish neighbors that didn't have a garden made sukkot for their families in our garden. There were usually three or four sukkot in our garden. My father put on a long jacket and a black hat and said a prayer. My mother had her shawl on and boys wore small caps. We had meals in the sukkah through the whole period of Sukkot regardless of the weather.

There was a beautiful stone synagogue in the town. Women were sitting separately from men. At Chanukkah children got money. At Purim money was given to children and acquaintances. Purim was full of joy and fun. At Simchat Torah women and men began their dance at the synagogue in separate areas and then continued dancing together in the yard. There were processions with torches in the village - 'Let them know how Jews enjoy themselves. We are not afraid of anybody'.

Life was quiet and there were no conflicts. Ukrainians called Jews 'zhydy' [kikes] but there was no abuse: this was just the Ukrainian word for 'Jew'. [Editor's note: The word 'zhyd' is abusive in Russian, but not in Ukrainian. In Ukrainian villages 'zhyd' was the definition for a Jew and no other words for Jewish people were known.] My friend Catherine was a Ukrainian girl, my neighbor. We were like sisters. She liked to go to the synagogue with me. We studied at the Polish grammar school together. Half of the pupils were Jewish. There were no Jewish schools in the village, and Kosov, where there was a Jewish school, was seven kilometers from us and that was a little bit too far away. [Editor's note: there was a Jewish vocational school in Kosov that was established in 1898 sponsored by Baron de Girsh and there were Jewish schools where children studied in Hebrew].

Girls were taught Hebrew and Jewish traditions at home and boys studied at the synagogue in Kosov. In grammar school we had classes with a Catholic priest. We sang Ukrainian songs with Ukrainian children and they sang Jewish songs with us. The soul belongs to its people and has its

own consolation. However much fun we had at school I didn't enjoy studying. My mother even went to ask my teacher to help me catch up with my studies, but the teacher replied, 'How can we help her if she doesn't want to study and runs away from school'. I didn't like school, but I enjoyed reading Polish love stories. My schoolmates from the Polish school gave me books. I left school after five years of studies. I was an obstinate girl and always did what I wanted. I didn't have any special plans for the future. I wanted to live with my parents and help my mother about the house.

When I was ten I fell and broke my collarbone. Nowadays doctors help with such problems, but at that time my bone knitted in a wrong way and I had my bone sticking out. I felt uncomfortable about it and wore high-necked clothes. I was short and thin and never gained weight no matter how much I ate. I thought that my problem made me different from others and that I was going to stay with my parents for the rest of my life. My brother Alter lived in his master's house in Kosov. I often went to see him and helped him with his work: I stitched buttonholes and sewed on buttons. Sometimes I stayed there longer, though I didn't quite like it there. My brother Alter lived in a small room on the second floor. There was a dirty common toilet at quite a distance from the house or a bucket in the room. His master was Jewish and the attitudes were loyal.

In the 1930s Zionist activists from Palestine arrived and tried to convince my parents to move there. I said to my father, 'Let's go there - why sit here?', but he replied 'No, I can't go there since I have no profession and there are no jobs for laborers there'. My father wasn't young any longer while they needed young employees in Palestine. They invited girls in particular. There were probably not many girls in Palestine. One young Jewish man even wanted to marry me to go to Palestine, but I refused since I didn't want to leave my family. I didn't want to get married either. Besides, we got assistance provided by America: clothing, food and some money that my father received. It was said to be provided by Joint 5. We knew little about it, we just thought that wealthier Jews were helping poorer ones. We didn't know about Zionism or other Jewish movements.

There were Polish executives in Kosov and neighboring areas. They treated Jews well and had Jewish assistants. During a short period Jacob Gardner, a Jewish man, was mayor in Kosov. On the other hand, the Polish population didn't trust the Ukrainian one to hold any key positions in the town. Hutsuls, local Ukrainians, were very good at woodcrafts and carpet weaving. There was a loom in almost every Ukrainian house. Besides carpets they also made sheep wool blankets - 'lizhnyki'. Some Jews also took over carpet making. There was a Jewish carpet making shop with about 40 employees. [Editor's note: Kosov still is a center of Ukrainian folk crafts today.]

We had a loom at home. My mother and I wove carpets and I also liked making picture wall carpets. When my brother brought pictures of Lenin and Stalin and said that they were leaders and we had to keep them in secret I wove their portraits on carpets and hid them. We didn't have information about what was going on in the outer world - in the Soviet Union, in particular. There was only one radio in the village that broadcast programs in Russian that only very few people could understand. However, we had some knowledge about the communist society from newspapers in Ukrainian that were distributed secretly. We believed this was the realm of wealth and justice where all people were equal and there were no rich or poor. Many people looked forward to the establishment of the Soviet power in our area hoping for a better and happier life. Poor Ukrainians and poor Jews looked forward to the coming of the Soviet army. I took no interest in politics and believed my brother Alter who told me about a happy life in the Soviet Union.

Young people were very enthusiastic when the Soviet troops came to where we lived in 1939, while my father and mother were less excited. They were getting older and were afraid of new developments. Shortly afterward Alter was recruited to the army and my mother was so concerned that she even fell ill. I took my carpets with pictures of Lenin and Stalin to the recruitment office and they let my brother go home. They only told him to stay away from anyone who could report on him to higher military authorities. Our town became a district center [Editors note: administrative unit in the Soviet Union]. There were many young military men and there were dancing parties arranged in the evenings. I didn't go to those parties while my sister Itta liked them a lot.

During the War

We lived two quiet years [from September 1939 through June 1941] with the Soviet power. There were no disturbances of Jewish life in Kosov and we went to the synagogue and celebrated holidays as before. My mother and I did the housekeeping and my father was a pensioner. Since I gave portraits of Stalin and Lenin to the military authorities our family was referred to as one of those that were loyal to the Soviet power. Besides, we didn't own any business or get involved in any social activities. Wealthier Jews lost their stores or shops that were expropriated by the state, but we didn't suffer from any suppression. We were in no hurry to even join a collective farm 6.

We didn't have any information about the situation in Europe since we didn't understand radio programs in Russian. That the war began on 22nd June 1941 was a surprise. My father or mother never took any interest in politics and we used newspapers for kindling our stove. Refugees from Hungary, Romania and Poland began to come to Kosov telling horrible stories about German brutalities against Jews. People could hardly believe what they were told, besides, it seemed to be so far away from us. There were a few German families in Kosov - very nice people, and we could never understand for what reasons Germany attacked the Soviet Union and why there had to be a war. We were scared. My mother decided to get food stocks. A few days after the war began my mother gave me 50 rubles to go to my sister Itta, who worked as a clerk in Kosov, to buy sugar. To get to Kosov I had to cross a bridge over a mountainous river. I crossed it and climbed a hill when I heard a terrible roar. I looked back and saw the bridge fly up into the air after it was bombed by a plane. At that moment I realized that I had lost my mother and my mother had lost me. The river parted us forever and there was no way for me to return home. I cried and wailed, but there was nothing to do about it.

Itta and I learned about what happened to our parents after we returned to Pristyn from evacuation in 1945. Our Ukrainian neighbors told us the sad story. When Romanian troops came to the village some local Ukrainian villagers began to rob and abuse their Jewish neighbors Even Romanians came to protect Jews from abuse. In September 1941 the Germans came to the village. On 16-17 October 1941 they captured almost half of the Jewish community of the village to take them to execution in the vicinity of the village. Our father, mother and Idlei hid in the cellar. A 'bukharka' - slang for 'drunkard' - Galia, a local Ukrainian, saw them and began to shout, calling the Germans to 'come here immediately: there is a 'zhydivka' hiding'. The Germans pulled my mother outside by her hair and my father by his beard. Idlei was running after them yelling in Yiddish, 'Don't touch my mother or I will kill you', but the Germans only laughed at him. When they reached the shooting ground the Germans forced my father to bury those Jews that had been shot there. I'm still terrified to think what my father must have felt while burying his Jewish neighbors and acquaintances. Then

the Germans put my father, mother and handicapped Idlei into a gas chamber truck and left the truck somewhere. When they were dead, their bodies were thrown out some place - nobody knows where. The rest of the Jews were taken to Kolomyia where they were gradually exterminated. Our neighbors told us this story when we visited Pistyn after the war. They witnessed what happened.

When I reached my sister Itta at the fire department in Kosov in the summer of 1941, they were all preparing for evacuation. This was a military fire unit and my sister was a civilian hired to work there. At that time nationality didn't matter at all. They evacuated and took their people with them regardless of nationality. My sister helped me obtain permission to evacuate with them. I had no documents or clothes with me. We reached Kharkov where I went to work as an attendant in a hospital and Itta worked in the hospital pharmacy. I did all the hard work washing and carrying wounded soldiers, washed blood stained bandages and cleaned the wards and surgery rooms until they began to shine. We were staying in the hospital since we didn't have a place to live. We had to forget our kosher habits and ate what we could get. We stayed in Kharkov until October 1941. The front was getting closer and the hospital moved to a settlement in Krasnodar region [150 kilometers from Kharkov]. I worked day and night in this hospital. The doctors, nurses and patients treated me well.

We often went to the frontline by sanitary train to pick up the wounded. Once we had a wounded German soldier and nobody wanted to help him. I washed him and applied a bandage. When others asked me why I was doing that I replied, 'All soldiers deserve treatment. He must shoot, he has no choice - if he doesn't shoot he would be shot at. You know, he is a German, but he is a soldier and you are solders. Hitler is Satan'. I never kept it a secret that I'm a Jew and I do what I think is right. People appreciated my kindness and told me that I would live to turn 100 years. They called me 'Manechka' like my mother did. Nobody cared that I had no education or that I spoke poor Russian. There were representatives of various nationalities in hospital; nobody cared about nationality issues. There were only thoughts about victory over the Nazis.

I found it interesting to look in the microscope when I came to the laboratory. One Jewish doctor said once, 'We need to employ Makhlia to do testing in the laboratory rather than wash floors. She must do blood testing'. The director of the hospital, a major, liked this idea. I was given 20 hours of training. I had to remember everything by heart since I could hardly write. My trainers said that I was smart since I passed my exam successfully. I learned to do blood testing very skillfully. Our patients always asked for me to take their blood tests. There was another nurse that also took blood tests. Soldiers complained that it hurt when she took their blood, but there were no complaints when I did it.

Vassiliy Khalzov was an attendant and then a medical nurse in this same hospital. He was a Tatar man who came from the Volga area in Russia. He was born in 1919. He was very handy, and he was a great storyteller. We were friends and he proposed to me several times. I couldn't understand whether it was a joke or he was serious and replied that I wished to be a spinster. I hoped to meet a Jewish man, but where was I to find one? So many Jews perished either during the occupation or at the front. Vassiliy often went on trips to the frontline or to escort a patient home. When he came back he used to say, 'Don't be afraid of me, I'm a Jew, too', meaning that the two of us had to stick together and that we were alike in some respect. I was raised in such manner that developed a conviction in me that Jews had to marry their own kind and I wasn't used to thinking about a man of a different nationality.

After the War

The war was coming to an end. We worked 15 hours per day in the hospital, had meals and slept there. Ukraine was liberated in the winter of 1944. Our hospital moved to Lvov in the spring of 1945. I shared a room with my sister Itta in the center of the town. We still had many patients from the frontline. In 1945 my brother Alter, who was demobilized after he was severely wounded, found me. He told me that when the war began Maria, a Ukrainian woman from Kosov, hid him. She was in love with him and would have done anything for him. She even threatened to kill her own husband, who was a policeman and worked for the Germans. Alter ran away from her, crossed the frontline and joined the Soviet army. He was wounded several times and participated in the liberation of Ukraine, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1946 Alter married Sonia, the daughter of a rabbi from Wroclav in Poland. I don't know how they met. They had their wedding in Lvov; it was a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and a rabbi. My sister and I made traditional food: gefilte fish and everything else our mother had taught us.

The husband of Sonia's sister was a tailor and my brother became his assistant. In 1946 Soviet authorities permitted the Polish population to return to Poland and my brother and his family moved to Wroclav. Alter always observed Jewish traditions except during his service in the army. My brother had two sons born there. They moved to the US in the 1950s. They live in Chicago now. I never saw Alter again, and he didn't describe what he thought about his life in Chicago. When my brother turned 80 [in 1988] he decided to have a bullet, which he had had for 50 years, removed from his body. He passed away during the surgery. On the day he died his grandson was born and named Alter after my brother. In the early 1950s Maria, the Ukrainian woman who rescued Alter, found me to get information about Alter. I told her that I didn't know where he was as my brother asked me to do. She began to cry and said that she would be praying for him.

My sister Itta married Vershkin, a Russian man, a military, in 1946. They lived not far from us in Lvov. After the war Jews tried to switch to Russian names [common name] 7 to avoid teasing or mocking. Itta changed her Jewish name to Lida, a Russian name. She has three children. Her son Victor lives in Lvov and her daughters married Ukrainian men and moved away: Tania lives in St. Petersburg and Klava lives in Zhytomyr. Itta lives in the vicinity of Lvov. We seldom see each other. Her husband died in the 1980s. Itta has been ill since then.

Vassiliy kept proposing to me, but I just cracked jokes in return. When my brother returned and met Vassiliy they became friends. My brother said to me, 'Makhlia, he is not a Jew, but he is a good man. He won't let you down'. Vassiliy told me that he was also circumcised. [Circumcision is also customary with Tatar people.] Vassiliy always made a good impression on people. I don't know where he studied, but he seemed to know everything. He could discuss any subject and was great company.

My brother and Vassiliy convinced me to marry Vassiliy. Actually, we didn't have a ceremony - we just began to live together in a room in the hospital. I got pregnant. In 1946 I gave birth to three girls. Vassiliy was away taking some patients home. The doctors gave me only one girl: she was the tiniest of the three and weighed only 900 grams. I didn't even see the two other girls and have no idea what happened there, the doctors probably gave them away for adoption for money. What could I do being a weak, hungry and helpless woman with no education? I didn't even know where to get help. There were many childless families after the war. Women wanted children, but couldn't

bear them due to the hardships that they went through during the war.

The doctors came to explain the situation to me. They said that Vassiliy was far away and might not come back and I was too old to raise three children. They said the girls were in good hands and would have a good life. This was true - Vassiliy was far away and I didn't even know where. There was a woman doctor - she tried, but was childless for ten years. She begged me to give her my little girl. She was such a tiny little girl, but when I took her to feed she grabbed my breast so greedily. I didn't give her away. I decided to raise her by myself. I named her Leya after my mother, but someone told me that this Jewish name would spoil her life. So I gave her the Russian name of Ludmila, but for myself I called her Leya. Her full name Ludmila is written in all her documents. At home we affectionately called her Leya. Later I also began to call her Ludmila. When Vassiliy returned home he got mad from what he heard. He ran to the maternity hospital demanding his girls. The obstetrician there calmed him down, 'She will have so many children that you wouldn't know what to do with them. The girls are no longer in town. One went to a general's family and the other one to the family of a colonel'. Nobody would tell us where to look for the girls anyway.

That same year, in 1946, Vassiliy and I registered our marriage in a registry office. We didn't have a wedding party. I took my husband's last name - Khalzova. Vassiliy demobilized from the army and began to work at the flour mill factory; he was a mechanic there. He didn't allow me to go to work. I was to look after the children. That doctor was right: our daughter Valentina was born in 1949 and Alla followed in 1953. My husband wanted a boy, but we didn't have one. I didn't want to have many children and had seven abortions.

Vassiliy was a very skilled mechanic and had a lot of work to do. He picked up any work to make more money for the family. Vassiliy was very hardworking and thought that 'a hundred rubles was better than a hundred friends'. [Editor's note: he reversed the Russian saying 'A hundred friends are better than a hundred rubles'.] He was very smart at work and his colleagues said about him, 'he is smart as a zhyd'. Common Ukrainians used to call smart people 'zhydy', there was even some envy to this word. He told me to stay at home and used to say that he would find out how to provide for us. I took good care of our girls: I made clothes, embroidered them and they were always dressed like little dolls.

I didn't celebrate any Jewish traditions after the war - it's not that I forgot them, but somehow I didn't observe any. My daughters weren't raised Jewish. We spoke Russian at home. I just told them about my mother and about our life in the village. When we visited Itta we sang songs that Itta and I remembered since we were children. I cooked the way I was used to. Vassiliy didn't eat pork either. We didn't specifically follow the kosher laws, but we kept meat products separately from dairy products. I might hear the abusive 'zhydovka' while standing in line to buy something, but, as I say, I know how to answer for them to leave me alone. And frankly, I didn't pay much attention to any such demonstrations of anti-Semitism. Life was difficult and common people blamed Jews for their problems, but I always reacted in such manner that they never made another attempt to hurt me.

We lived our life and didn't care about our political surroundings. I remember Stalin's death [March 1953]. I liked him since I was making his portrait - he was a handsome man with a moustache. I cried after him. Vassiliy said when he came home and saw me crying, 'Stop crying; he is not your

husband or brother, is he?' I thought that if Stalin had known the true state of things he wouldn't have allowed Jews or Russians or anyone else to be suppressed and offended. Jews and Russians were suppressed in similar ways, and my husband was always ready to come to anybody's help. But Vassiliy said to me that he was there to protect me, not Stalin. He did everything for the family, that's true.

During the rule of Khrushchev 8 there were problems with bread. [Editor's note: in 1962-1963 bread was released to people for special coupons since there were no crops of wheat and they had to stand in long lines for two to three hours to get some bread. This was low quality bread mixed with corn flour.] There wasn't enough bread and it was very low quality baked from corn flour, but I had no problem whatsoever. Vassiliy repaired equipment at the flour mill and we always had flour. I baked bread like my mother taught me. Vassiliy didn't like living in the center of town where there were few trees. He didn't like asphalted streets. We changed our apartment to a house in a quiet green neighborhood. Vassiliy made cages for rabbits. He slaughtered them and I cooked rabbit meat. I tried to tell him that it was sinful to slaughter rabbits that we raised, but he had his own law: it was sinful to steal or kill, but one could eat what was good. He did everything for the family, but he had his own rules that the family had to make up with. My husband worked a lot and we didn't have much free time. We didn't go to theaters. Sometimes my daughter and I went to the cinema; we liked Indian films.

Our girls studied well at school and I decided to go to work. I became a cleaning woman in the nearest polyclinic in 1961. When my husband heard about it he beat me with his belt since he wanted me to stay home. This was the only time he behaved like that; he just got furious when he heard that I wished to go to work. However, I had my own character and I explained to him that our girls were growing up and needed new clothes and shoes and that I was going to make some money for them to have what was necessary. My husband provided everything necessary, but our girls wanted to have nice clothes or shoes, which again Vassiliy didn't quite understand due to his rough character. I wanted to earn some extra money for our girls. I need to say that I always felt comfortable in the family and had a feeling of being protected and the feeling of stability. When I got my salary for the first two weeks I bought my husband a bottle of vodka and he agreed that it was all right for me to go to work. He came to the polyclinic to help me do my work saying, 'I feel uncomfortable that you have to work'. Vassiliy loved me. He died in 1972 - he came home from work, lay down and never woke up. I don't know what happened to him, but he drank a lot. He worked hard and drank hard.

Ludmila finished school and a college. She worked as an accountant at a meat factory. She married Vladimir Voronin, a Russian man. I didn't have any objections to her marriage - he loves her and they get along well. Ludmila has a daughter, Tania, and a granddaughter, Martusia - my great granddaughter. Martusia goes to the Jewish school. She is a very pretty girl. She performs at concerts and studies Hebrew. She says, 'I'm not Ukrainian, I'm a Jew'. Tania laughs, 'I'm also a Jew and so is my mother - we are all Jews'. Ludmila is a pensioner; she goes to Hesed and is interested in Jewish life. She goes to concerts and celebrations. She knows more about traditions than I do. In Hesed they attend classes where they study Jewish traditions, the history of the Jewish people and Jewish literature while I have forgotten most of it.

Valentina finished school and didn't want to continue her studies. She went to work as a clerk at a passport office. She married Zarovskiy, a Polish man. His mother was a cleaning woman at a

synagogue and treated Jews with understanding and sympathy. He got a good education to become a lawyer. They have a big apartment in the center of Lvov. Their daughter Irina is a nice girl and very cheerful. She is also a lawyer. Their son Vladek is a student at Lvov University. He lives alone.

My children live in Lvov. They come to see me and help me with the housework. Lvov is a small town and it only takes them 20-30 minutes to get to my place.

I live with my younger daughter Alla. She has a higher education - she graduated from polytechnic college and worked as an engineer at a TV factory, but who needs engineers nowadays? All industrial enterprises in Lvov have been shut down and many engineers have lost their jobs. The state doesn't finance big enterprises. Their equipment is obsolete and they cannot survive in the conditions of market economy. Alla works as a cook in the administration of Jewish organizations when representatives of Joint or other associations visit them - representatives of Jewish communities from other towns. There are also visitors from Israel or USA. She makes delicious Jewish traditional food. She had bad luck at the beginning when she married a Ukrainian man that tortured us. He stole money from us, beat us. He is in prison for assault now. Alla has a wonderful son, my beloved grandson Alexei. He is 26. He works as a manager in a private company in Rovno and is a very respectable man. He comes on a visit with his fiancée every now and then. Alla lives with another Ukrainian man - Misha. He is a very nice man and loves Alla dearly. He helps her to wash bed linen and floors. He is kind to me. He tells me that I shouldn't do anything, but I simply need to do some work. I move about the house, but I don't go out - I will be 90 soon.

We don't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays at home. I go to Hesed when I get an invitation and when it's warm. I like to be examined by doctors, but I don't need free dinners - Alla makes better food at home. I like seeing other Jews at Hesed. We have a lot to talk about. We enjoy celebrating holidays and singing old songs. When we lived in the center of the town I had Jewish friends, but here there are only goyim. I don't feel like even talking with them. One neighbor here threw stones at my dog - and she is such a lovely and nice dog. I reprimanded him and he said, 'Why is a zhydovka speaking here? You don't have the right to talk here'. I didn't say anything in response. I'm glad that there are Jewish organizations in town that support us. This is due to perestroika 9, when many things changed for the better. People know more about the suffering of our people and their attitude changed for the better.

You know, Jews have always been persecuted. Now there are Arabs living beside Jews. They shoot at our children and hunt for us everywhere. I'm 90 and when I see how they fight with our men I may have a heart attack. What do they want? They want this land, but Jews worked hard to get this land. If I lived in Israel I would have a heart attack. I shall not move from here. My children say they feel all right here. They are half-Jews and don't have this strong spiritual bond with Jews in Israel. As for me, I shall always be where my children are.

I hardly ever see my sister Itta, although she lives in Lvov. We talk on the phone. Only when her children come to visit her we get together. Her daughter Tania tells us how Jews are supported in Leningrad and Klava tells me about Zhytomyr. Jewish communities support their members. They began to learn Jewish traditions when Hesed offices were established in various towns. This was something new and interesting for them. Since my sister and I always told our children about the life of our parents they were prepared to perceive this information with interest and their families

show support and understanding of their needs.

I feel that I will die soon - my mother comes to me in my dreams. She says, 'Manya, I'm taking you with me. You've had enough hardships in life. You'll be in paradise with us, it is better here. You will die - you will not suffer, just hear an echo and this will be the end'. Misha, Alla's husband, says to me, 'You don't need to leave this life yet, you have to live longer to look at the sun and people'. Perhaps, I will wait.

Glossary

1 Hasid
The follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

2 Guild I
In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

3 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.

4 Yanovski camp
a Nazi concentration camp in in Lvov, one of the biggest in Western Ukraine. In November 1941 Jews from Lvov and the neighboring towns and villages were taken to the camp: about 70,000 people in total. During occupation thousands of Jewish inmates, Soviet prisoners-of-war and Ukrainian nationalists were exterminated in this camp. In November 1943 the Nazis resolved to exterminate the inmates as well as all the traces of the camp before the Soviet Army came. A group of inmates attempted to escape, but most were killed. The few survivors told the world about the camp. In total 200,000 citizens including over 130,000 Jews were exterminated in this camp from November 1941 till November 1943.

5 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)
The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re- establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

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

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

8 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.

9 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.