Emiliya Israilovna Shulman

I, Emiliya Israilovna Shulman was born on September 18th,

1931 in the city of Chechersk in the Gomel region of Belorussia.

My family background

My ancestors, both on my father's and my mother's sides, were all from Belarus, from small Jewish settlements. Chechersk was one such settlement. It was a small, comfortable and attractive town, located on the banks of the Checheri River that flowed. Chechersk was considered a Jewish settlement because very many Jews lived there, especially before the war. Conversation at every step on the street, on the benches and in the market was held in Yiddish. This was especially noticeable in the market, where everyone talked quite loudly. This gave one the feeling that only Jews lived in the city, but there lived, of course, Belarussians as well. Russians were less prevalent.

Chechersk is located 60 km from the railroad, but only 17 km from the Kiev-Gomel-Leningrad highway that we called "Bolshak." However the main connection was by the Sozh River. Before the war boats traveled by the river and timber was rafter. The Sozh got shallower and the bigger boats stopped, although the timber rafter continued. Small crafts, that connected Chechersk with other Jewish "settlements" and Gomel, also continued to run. During my childhood it was a very clean, comfortable and pretty town with a wonderful climate. It was possible to go swimming in the river and to fish. In the woods there were many mushrooms and berries. All our relatives and acquaintances went there to vacation in the summer, as well as the relatives and acquaintances of other Jewish families in the city.

If one comes down from the Lesion Mountains, Chechersk would be visible like on a palm; as if it was located in a cup. To the left and right collective farm gardens were spread out. The road led to the center of the city. It was the only paved road. When the wind blew it would raise dust clouds on the roads. In the center of the city were the police, izpolkom [local administrative committee], club, library and two schools, as well as the agricultural school. The city also contained a wine factory, smokehouse, slaughterhouse, a cloth factory, the last being famous in the surrounding villages and beyond. The houses were one story and made of wood. There were a few stone houses (owned by merchants before the revolution) in which state organizations were located. The houses were

drowning in gardens, having residents, and vegetable plots, maintaining herds: cows and chickens (Belarussian families also had pigs), but these were mostly those who lived in the sloboda and Podol izpolkom [local administrative committee]. In the center of the city gardens were very small, mostly the houses were surrounded by gardens and, before each house was a small plot sown with flowers. Each house had a porch where adults and children would gather in the evenings. It wasn't done to enter the house during the summer. There was no water piping in the city. The water was collected at 'kolonki' (water pumps). All comforts were "in the yard". Each house had to have a stove, from which the heater ran. No matter the size of the house, it had to have separate sleeping quarters. The bedroom could consist of one bed and a chair. If there was a dresser, that was already a sign of wealth. Furniture was homemade. The central room of the house was called the 'zal' (room) and it could be either 8 square meters or 28 square meters, but it was necessary. The barn and cellar were located in the yard. The residents traveled by horse. The only cards were state-owned, transport and light 'Emki.' It was so before and after the war.

There was a large city park in Chechersk. Elderly residents said that it had been laid out with very interesting and rather rare sorts of trees. The park broke off at the Checher, a tributary of the Sozh. It was the place to meet people. Before the war there were two stages there. On one, amateur and out of town artists (from Gomel) would perform. On the other was a dance floor. After the war the dance floor was still whole, but the Germans burned the amateur theater stage and after the war it wasn't rebuilt.

The entrance to Chechersk- a mountain- was named Zamkovoi [Zamok means castle in English] because the end of the central street was a ratusha [tower]. Older residents said that it was a watchtower, surrounded with defensive buildings for the defense of Chechersk against attacks. The ratusha was ancient. During the war it didn't burn down. Besides the center, Chechersk had Podol, where mostly Jews lived, and two slobody. To the right of the ratusha, the road led to the Jewish cemetery, after which was the village of Edinstvo in which there was a collective farm. Mostly Belarussians lived in this neighborhood.

The second sloboda led to the ferry on the river Checher. The main employment of these residents was timber rafting and ship loading. There was also a timber mill and a handmade furniture factory where they made tables, stools, etc. In Podol lived mostly Jews -- craftsmen. The Jewish bathhouse was also located here. There were two for women and one for men. Next to the banya, in a large wooden house, lived the Jewish family, Plotnikov, which had many children. Many headed there after the banya, including my sister and myself. They had a very large central room or 'zal', with a bad floor (after the war it was difficult to repair), but there was a large table with a samovar on it. Such tea as there is now was not for sale in those days, and everyone drank tea made of dried herbs. One could always sit with the Plotnikovs, to relax after the banya and drink tea. They were very hospitable people.

One of the Plotnikov daughters worked in the library of the party office of the executive committee. Her nickname was "horse head." She was not beautiful, but very kind. When we were finishing 10th grade and needed to find specialized literature (especially in history) that wasn't available anywhere except at the party office, she would whisper to us when we could come by (officially this was forbidden) and she would sit up late with us. She wasn't offended by her nickname and always made jokes about herself.

There was a band of Jewish boys in Podol that included my cousin Grisha (Uncle Miron’s stepson). They didn’t study well and didn’t act much better, therefore they didn’t study with us, but in a village across the Checher. I don’t know when they studied because they mostly wandered around Chechersk, but they did receive certificates of graduation from 7th grade. They didn’t want to study any further and they became tailors, joiners and cobblers, like their fathers. One even became a tractor operator. Grisha was drafted into the army and there learned to be a chauffeur. He was a fan of Zenith Leningrad, although while in Chechersk he knew nothing of football. He was happy when he managed to get a job working as a chauffeur for them. He drove them around in the private bus for a few years and they found him a room in a communal apartment in Leningrad.

In Chechersk, as in any Jewish ‘settlement’ we had our own famous people. I remember one such person very well. He was of small size and the whole family was focused on him. My grandmother called the family ‘kuropatok’ (chicks). Zilberg was a very talented musician even though he didn’t know musical theory. He organized an orchestra that played various musical instruments, whatever was to be found. This included a Belarussian buben [tambourine]. They were invited to weddings and other events, including funerals. These weren’t Jewish funerals and music is never part of Jewish ceremony. One day, this was in late fall, some party official died. Zilberg was invited, with the orchestra, to play at the funeral. However, before funerals one isn't fed. He had a large family where no one ever had enough to eat and his orchestra was made up of poor Jewish boys. The day was very cold with wet snow. The roads were bad, they had ‘hudaye’ (thin) shoes on, and the cemetery was rather far away. They were freezing, hungry and weren’t given anything to drink. And suddenly, instead of the funeral march, Zilberg and his crew struck up ‘Karapet moi bednii ’ [very famous folk song in pre-war Russia]. How they saved themselves from the furious relatives I can only guess, but this did help them. The nickname “karapet” stuck to Zilberg until the end of his days. Even after this incident they were, of course, invited to funerals - it was the only orchestra in town. But there was no longer a need to warn him.

There wouldn’t have been such interesting evenings in Chechersk’s club without him. He organized artistic improvisations. It would have been difficult to imagine him without the club, just as the club without him. Their house was on the border between Chechersk itself and Podol. The house was small, and how they all fit into it, I don’t know -- there were very many of them. It was, however, a very warm and friendly family, and we all helped them as much as we could.

We also had a very flamboyant photographer, Portnov. He always took several frames. Each time he said, “Attention! Shooting!” Then he would disappear into his room, come back spread out his hands and say, “Ruined!” And everything was repeated from the beginning, sometimes five times.

Growing up

Next to our school was the wine factory. The gate was always open and we loved to run in there during breaks. Large pots of cranberries stood there and we would take those cranberries. At school we didn’t’ so much eat the berries as spill them all over. Grapes didn’t grow in Chechersk and therefore the wine at the factory was made from berries (raspberries, blackberries, wild and domestic strawberries) and apples. I remember one story. There was a wine contest of Belarussian wines in Minsk and some of the product of the Chechersk factory had to be sent. A man named Lusik Berin was sent. I don’t remember who he was, either a technician or an assistant in storage. He didn’t realize that he was to bring wines of different sorts. He took one sort of wine, many

different labels and headed off to Minsk. When he got there and realized that he was supposed to present examples of different wines to the committee, he bought bottles, poured his wine into the bottles and stuck different labels on each bottle, and handed them all in. The man had a sense of humor, and when he learned that the Chechersk wine factory was awarded a place in one category of wine he asked why the cranberry wine didn't get an award. He was told that there was something not quite right. He said: "Very interesting. All the wine was from one barrel so how could one be a little off and the other not?" He was Jewish, a joker.

I remember a few more habits, for example the washing of laundry. In the winter we washed clothes in a special way. Dirty laundry was loaded into a large barrel mixed with ashes. Then large stones were heated in the oven and dropped into the barrel. This was called "buchit' clothing". When this laundry had been left for the allotted time, it was taken out, hung on a yoke and taken to the "pelka". The pelka is a hole that was made in the ice of the Checher and where the laundry was rinsed in ice-cold water. It came out very clean. We didn't iron our clothes with an iron, but with valik. This was an invention that was made up of two parts. One part was circular and resembled a rolling pin that one rolls dough out with. The second valik was large, with a handle and stripes were cut into it. All the laundry was put on the table and wrapped onto the first part while the second ironed the cloth. I, myself, often did this. I am talking about linen cloth. It could only be ironed in this way. After the war we already had irons with charcoal, but out of laziness we continued to iron with the 'valik.'

We children also loved the city fair. There were two of them, spring and fall. The bazaar square was very large. There were many wares and all sorts of delicious things. I remember that geese and chickens were bought by the bunch. I also remember how my grandmother would choose her chickens. I don't know how polite this will sound, but I have to tell you. She would take the chicken in her hand, lift up its tail, blow and by some telltale signs, would choose some while refusing others. Several chickens were taken at once, and then when needed they were taken to a special butcher, such as our neighbor Faberov. He would cut the chicken and then it could be used as food.

I also remember how we conserved cabbage. Usually, for this kind of work, we would invite women form the Belarussian sloboda. Lots of cabbage was salted, several barrels, and then stood in the cellar. The women would rip up the cabbage, with much laughter and many songs. In general Belarussian women did many jobs in Jewish homes. Our housekeeper Akulina was also from sloboda. I don't remember any family in which there was a Jewish housekeeper or nanny. It just wasn't done. We, however, did live very happily with the Belarussians. Akulina's brother, when the war started and our house burned down, wanted to take us in himself, and my grandmother kept up a very warm relationship with her Belarussian friends from Zagore until the end of her days. Everyone respected the traditions of the other. Alas, now all has changed.

There was a synagogue and Jewish community in the city, which my grandmother Mera attended. A Jewish cemetery also existed, where our relatives that had perished in the pogrom in the village of Zagore, Chechersk uyezd [district] in May of 1922, including my grandfather Borukh, mother's father, were buried. In the city Jewish traditions were observed, especially among the older generations. All Jews celebrated Passover. Circumcision was mandatory for Jewish boys. Weddings were Jewish. There were no mixed marriages: they appeared much later, after the war. There was a stratification of the population.

The “elite” lived in the center of the city: white collar workers at governmental institutions and the more prosperous Jews. Jewish workers lived in Podol. Podol was spread along the ravine through which flowed a stream that emptied into the Checheri. Several houses were located right on the edge of the ravine, but most were built on the spot where the ravine met the plains. There lived the shoemakers, tailors, hairdressers, carpenters, furniture makers and those who made chalk for whitewashing. Professions were handed down from father to son. There were very poor families, as well as more prosperous ones. However, if a Jewish girl from the “center” married a boy from “Podol”, it was considered an unequal marriage, and her parents were displeased.

From childhood I had heard of the tragedy that had taken place in our family before my birth, in 1922. However, I only learned the full details in 1970 from Mikhail Davidovich Bolshun, the son of grandmother’s brother David, when I was visiting relatives in Pyatigorsk. Evidently it was too difficult for both Mother and Grandmother to speak of it.

In the spring of 1922 the Savitzky brothers’ band, former timber traders, tried to leave for Poland. Along the way the bandits would suddenly attack a village and knife the Jews with howls of, “Yid! Give us a grosz (Polish penny)!” They fell upon the village of Zagore on May 2nd.

On the eve of the pogrom, there were many guests at Grandfather Borukh’s house. Relatives had arrived from the Caucasian mountains where there was a drought and famine. With then was a young couple – bride-, and groom-to-be. Early that morning, Grandmother, along with her niece Hannah, David Bolshun’s daughter, and Miron’s wife left for the woods to “koponichit’ lyado” (to prepare a new field for planting) and to collect strochka and morels, spring mushrooms. When they were preparing to return home, Hannah noticed horsemen on the road. She said to Grandmother, “Aunt Mera! Here come riders. One of them is on your horse. And there’s the cart full of things.” The women sensed the threat and hid themselves, not going on the road.

The horsemen rode past. The women ran to the village. Already on the way they could hear screams and weeping. Around the house there was no one. The bandits had frightened the neighbors, Belarussian peasants. No one had come to the aid of the victims because the pogromists had promised to kill all those who helped the “Yids.”

When the women opened the door to the house, blood trickled out in rivers. The bandits had beaten to death with muzzle-loading guns 17 people --13 Jews and 4 Belarussians – “kombednoti” (poor people). The women were raped before they were killed, even nine-year-old Fira, Mama’s younger sister. Hannah and Miron’s first-born son, who was nine-months at that time, was put in a sitting hen’s basket and beaten with the gun, strokes in the form of a cross. Grandfather lay wrapped in the talith. He was murdered last. Before his death he prayed, watching the tortured death of his closest relatives.

The first to come and help was Uncle Misha Bolshun who had spent the night in a neighboring village. He returned to Zagore in the morning and instantly sent his Belarussian friends to warn the Jews in the village of Belyaevki. Thanks to the warning, those managed to organize defenses and didn’t let the bandits into the village. The band was forced to turn off the fields and get to the Polish borders through the woods.

Most of the peasants were terribly frightened which didn't help their suffering neighbors. Grandmother and uncle Misha loaded the bodies of the murdered onto two carts themselves. In accordance to Jewish tradition the men and women were laid separately. In the darkness of despair, Grandmother harnessed a cow to the second cart. Thus they left in order never to return. On the road to Chechersk a crowd met them. All already knew of the tragedy and showed true solidarity. Among the group were my mother and her brother Monei. They were studying in Chechersk and stayed for the holidays with their Uncle Abram, grandfather's brother. This saved their lives.

Miron was a member of the group of Chekists [members of the internal police, a precursor to the KGB] that organized the pursuit of the bandits. They found the band. Under the demands of the residents, they were given the death sentence and shot. The victims of the pogrom were buried in Chechersk. Anna Vladimirovna Novikova, Hannah and Miron's granddaughter, their daughter Sofia's daughter, found a photo of the farewell to the victims in the archives in Minsk. She sent the photograph to my sister Anna in Gomel who, after a request from our American relatives, sent the photo to Denver. From there a copy was sent to me. In this convoluted way that photograph came to me and now to you. That was a documentary witness to the tragedy. In the foreground on boards lie the bodies of the cruelly tortured victims. Their death united those who came to display their grief and decisiveness in revenging the murderers. Above the body of Grandfather Borukh sat Grandmother in mourning (first row from the bottom, first from the left), next to her sat her children: daughter Galya (my Mama), and son Emmanuil. In the second row from the bottom, the third man from the right (with a beard) is David Bolshun, next to him with her head bowed is his daughter Galya. Miron and Hannah aren't in the photo. Hannah lay paralyzed and Miron had left to apprehend the bandits.
Another account of these happenings was given by another of Hannah and Miron's granddaughters (their son Yakov's daughter), Anna Piotrovskaya, who now lives in Tver. She wrote her father's story word for word when she was 15. According to her, she knew little, at the time, of the persecution of our nation, and this history was written down in order not to forget the details. Here is the record:

"At that time in Belarus there were many bands, including nationalistic ones. One of them was the band of the Savitzky brothers. The Savitzkys were Polish gentry. The elder was a true monster, evil, savage, without pity. His wife Yadviga was the same as her husband. The younger Savitzky was faint-hearted, completely in the power of his older brother, obeying his commands without question. There were about 40 cutthroats in the band, soulless, evil and whose sense were clouded by the glitter of gold and the need for profit which they obtained through robbery and violence. The band eliminated Jews in a brutal manner: demanding gold, they tortured the members of the homeowner's family in front of him. There was no pity for the elderly or children.

This is what happened in Zagore in 1922. That day, when most of the residents were working in the forest (including Miron), the Savitzkys came into the village. In Grandfather David's house, was Grandmother Klara Bolshun, Miron's mother-in-law, with the 9-month-old baby, Miron's first-born Yosif. After not getting any money from Grandmother, as there simply wasn't any, the bandits chopped off Yosif's head with and axe, in front of her, then they hit Grandmother in the stomach. In other houses the attacks on the residents were just as cruel. In Borukh Kosoi's home, his daughter

was raped, the household members were killed and the males were violently attacked. Borukh prayed and wept, he was tortured last. Miron said that there was absolutely nothing of worth for them to take. Everyone lived on their own work.

So, when Miron and Hannah returned from the forest (Miron was the head of a brigade in the woods while Hannah and Aunt Mera worked to make clearings for sowing), and came up to the house, they saw in the window a basket that had held a laying hen, but now held the expressionless head of their child. Hannah's legs deserted her and she was instantly paralyzed. She lost her ability to speak. They carried her into the house between the two of them. Miron announced for all to hear that he would find the bandits and kill them with his own hands. And he left on their trail. The Savitzkys had done as follows: they robbed the post-office, tortured and killed the elderly postman. It was a miracle that his 15-year-old grandson who was present during the execution was left whole. He told Miron that the Savitzkys had commandeered a cart and left for the river in a great hurry.

Miron rode to the river. He was lucky because the man who ran the ferry, shaking from what he had just gone through, said that the bandits were planning to get to Kiev. He heard this when the brothers, not afraid to speak in front of him, had been discussing their further route. The elder Savitzky ordered his brother to kill the ferryman. After going into the woods to deal with the ferryman, the younger brother couldn't handle the man's pleading, pitied him and let him go. This, in the long run, led to the damnation of his brother.

And so, all roads lead to Kiev. In Kiev, in the Cheka at the time, worked a detective Legre (or Lengre, I can't answer for the exact name). Miron came to him and told him what happened in Zagore. They then began to search for the Savitzkys. It seemed that they had stopped in the most expensive hotel in Kiev, and all three were staying in one room. They only left the room 3 times a day, armed to the teeth, including Yadviga, they went down to the restaurant to eat.

The detective, for the longest time, couldn't think of a way to arrest the bandits, take them alive, so that they couldn't start a shoot out and injure innocent bystanders. He was also afraid that they would unexpectedly hide the last of their travel to Poland. The detective's plan was such: the trio always ate together, heading single file down a long corridor. The windows on the corridor were curtained. Behind the curtains Legre hid the Chekist trap and captured all three.

Miron attended the trial. The elder Savitzky conducted himself defiantly and impertinently. He blamed his brother for his capture, accusing him of faint-heartedness, saying that he had destroyed them all. He asked for permission to say some last words. Upon being given permission, he admitted the crimes and answered the prosecutor. He also said that Yadviga was completely innocent. The brothers and many members of their band that had been rounded up were shot, and Yadviga was given 25 years. The elder Savitzky was shot right in the courtyard before the courthouse. The large crowd of people was barely contained. They demanded Savitzky for themselves to deal with. In total, out of three families -- Bolshun, Kosoi and Maron -- 22 people were cruelly tortured and murdered.

For a long time Hannah lay paralyzed, deprived of speech. She couldn't be cured. An acquaintance told Miron that he knew of a witch doctor that might be able to cure Hannah. Miron put Hannah in a cart and took her to the doctor. The doctor said that he would try to return her to life, but asked

Miron not to enter the house so that he wouldn't hear. Miron sat on the porch and waited for a long time. Finally his patience snapped and he tried to enter. However the door was well locked and Miron, even with his great strength, couldn't open it. Then he heard a soul-rending cry. Hannah was calling for his help. Miron went mad, destroyed the door and suddenly realised: "she spoke!" He came in, Hannah was sitting up, and she left the house on her own."

The victims of the pogrom were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Chechersk. The government paid for two memorials on their graves. The Germans destroyed the cemetery during the war, but after the war we found their place of burial: a row of birches had been planted between the two long graves and the trees were saved. When my mother left Chechersk, with the money that we received from the sale of the house, we put up two memorials of sandstone and wrote a modest epitaph: "perished during the pogrom on the second of May, 1922." They say that the monuments are now in bad shape as limestone crumbles quickly.

My grandmother on my mother's side, Mera, couldn't live in her house in Zagore after the pogrom. She didn't enter the house, not even to take some things, and slept in the attic of the barn. She sold her house to the government and it housed an elementary school for a long time -- until the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. After Chernobyl all the residents of the village of Zagore were evacuated due to the high levels of radiation. They say that Grandfather Borukh's house still stands but has long been uninhabited.

With the help of relatives, Grandmother harvested the crop, sold it, and on the money from the house and the rye she bought a house in Chechersk. This was so that Galiya and Monya could continue their studies. In our family no one liked to remember the tragedy they lived through, but I remember that in our house in Chechersk there never were any flowers. Grandmother couldn't look at them because at the time of the pogrom her flowers were sprayed with blood.

Life worked out in such a way, that of my grandparents I only know my mother's mother Mera Dveira Kosaya well. She lived with us a long time. My mother's parents, Borukh Kosoy and Mera Dveira Kosaya, lived in the village of Zagore, Chechersk province, Gomel region until 1922. Grandmother Mera was born in 1890 in Chechersk. Grandfather was born in the 80th year of last century (1880), but I have no information as to where he was born. My mother's parents were religious people -- their native tongue was Yiddish. They observed Jewish traditions, kept up a prayer chapel where the local Jewish community met. Grandfather read the prayers himself.

There were flowers from Palestine in the house. In front of the house there was a garden, yard and many flowers. They had two horses, two cows and chickens. Grandmother was a strong-willed and powerful woman. She took care of the house and raised three children: my mother Galya, her sister Fira and brother Emmanuil. In addition, Grandmother dabbled in arable farming. She (with the help of relatives) cleared a piece of woodland and planted rye. Grandmother was very beautiful and had a reputation as a good housewife. She was widowed at the age of 32 and had suitors, but she turned them all down, saying that she could never find another such father for her children. She always trusted only in her own hands, I don't remember her not working.

Grandmother was very kind, social and hospitable. "One needs to offer only the best," she would say. There were always visitors in the house. For many years her former neighbors in the village would come to visit her, bringing gifts from the country and staying the night. Grandmother

forgave them for their traitorous weakness during the frightening minutes of the pogrom. She showed her grief to no one, meeting all with a joke and never thrusting her opinion on anyone. She was religious, went to synagogue, and followed Jewish traditions, but didn't demand this of Papa, who was a party worker. There was kosher food in the house, we baked matza, butchered the chickens at the shochet's, but we also celebrated Soviet holidays. Of the religious holidays, we always celebrated Jewish Passover. I remember that on Passover the food was very delicious. Grandmother also baked very tasty hamantashen (gomentashin) [triangles of pastry filled with poppy seeds baked on Purim]. My mother-in-law in Leningrad also baked gomentashes, but not only on holidays. Grandmother said that to bake them on days other than holidays was a sin. Grandmother was loved by everyone. On Sundays there would be a knock at the door and the question, "Does Mera Zagorskaya live here?" That was how everyone called Grandmother. They would bring her either berries, or baskets of mushrooms, bacon, or eggs. And she would give back all that she could. I remember one such incident. It was after the war. I was already studying at the university. Uncle Monya had given me the first perfume of my life. It was called 'Elada'. Grandmother's friend from Zagore was staying over. After a few days I noticed that very little was left in the bottle. I asked Grandmother if she had spilled some out by accident and she answered me, "I never thought that I'd raise such a 'zleibnei' (greedy) granddaughter. Girls of my century didn't have such things, so let her smell it for once in her life." Her wise advice for the future was as follows, "Go, my dear child and don't get lost. Pick the straight road."

Grandmother was with us during the evacuation. After the war, when Mama was imprisoned, she lived in Chechersk with Anya, my younger sister, (I was already studying at university). It was very difficult for her, but she never complained.

Our first home in Chechersk was destroyed by arson. The second burned down in a fire that caught several homes in Chechersk (the houses had been made of wood). Then Papa was given an apartment (half a house) by his work place and there I was born. This apartment also burned down, during the bombings of the war. After the war Mother's brother Monya bought us a very small house in front of which were a little garden and a barn. We rented the barn to some organization. They kept their horses there and in return helped us with firewood. Even thought the house was small, there was a bus stop nearby. People would come asking to rest, to feed their children or to sleep over. No one was ever turned away, neither Jews nor Belarussians.

During the war the Germans burned the synagogue and afterwards it wasn't rebuilt. The Jewish community gathered at someone's house as a prayer chapel. Our neighbor Faberov, who was a shochet, and my uncle Miron, my father's brother, were the leaders. Miron was invited to all the "brit milas" [circumcisions]. Jews gathered and prayed. My grandmother also attended the prayer chapel. Grandmother died in 1956 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Chechersk.

Grandmother's brother David Bolshun also moved to Chechersk after the pogrom of 1922, in which he lost his wife. He worked in the timber mill and timber rafting. He didn't marry again. He had three children who were already adults. His son Mikhail graduated from the agricultural school and was a winemaking expert. He lived with his wife in Pyatigorsk and worked as the head engineer of raw materials at a wine factory in Bishtau. His wife was a highly qualified (Party conference level) stenographer. They had no children. Galiya Bolshun was an accountant and before the war she worked in Chechersk. During the evacuation she, at first, was with us in Dourine and Moskalenka.

Then she worked as an accountant in a Kazakh village. Grandfather David first stayed with us in Moskalenka, then Galiya took him in with her in the village. There he died in 1948. Misha Bolshun served in the army for the entire war. After the war he took Galiya to Minvodei. She lived in Zheleznovodsk. Grandmother Mera and David had other relatives. They lived in Belarus before the war, but I neither knew them, nor remember them.

In Zagore Grandfather Borukh worked in the timber industry, travelling and marking trees for felling and transport on the Sozh river. This work he shared with my father’s brother Miron. My grandmother’s brother David Bolshun also worked in forestry. They also lived with their families in Zagore. Grandmother and Grandfather had a large house that grandfather’s brothers had helped him build before they left for America. Grandfather Borukh's brothers, as I have already said, left for America, but one of them, Abram, returned. He died in Chechersk before the war. His son Naum was one of the first people in the Komsomol. Before the war he worked in the CK VLKSM [Central Committee of the all-Union Leninist Communist Youth League] of Belarus, and during the war he was the assistant head of scouting for the partisan headquarters. After the war he was the head of Belbitsnaba (consumer services in Belarus) in the Ministry of Consumer Industry of BSSR [Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic]. He lived in Minsk. His son Wilem is now in America with his family. They live in Denver and we correspond with them. When one of them died, they were buried according to Jewish tradition. When my grandmother passed away Mama buried her in a grave, but observed all other traditions. How and what to do was explained to her and she followed them all (sat on the floor, didn’t turn on lights, etc). At that time most of these habits were kept up by the older generations.

I didn't know my grandparents on my father's side at all. I can only note their birthdays roughly: Grandfather Mikhail Maron - 1870, Grandmother Ester Riva Maron - 1880. I have no information about their birthplaces. I heard this story about them from my parents. Grandfather was of the well-to-do timber industrialists. He fell deeply in love with Ester Riva, who worked in their family as a servant. She was poor and without parents, but very beautiful. She was tall, stately blonde with wavy hair in a long braid. In addition she sang beautifully, but of marriage there was no question. Mikhail lost his head, stole the cashbox from his father and fled with Ester across the border. When they had spent all the money, they returned and he married her. His family disowned him from their home forever. His parents told him, "If you get hungry, maybe songs will replace your bread." They were poor, but loved each other very much and were happy. They lived in Cherven, a little town in Belarus. Grandfather Mikhail worked in timber. He died young of tuberculosis in the end of the 1920's. Grandmother Ester was a housewife who ran the household and raised the children. When her husband died she was left alone with eight children. However her family was very close and they all helped each other and "rose up the social ladder."

The children moved away, Miron and Israil (my father) lived in Chechersk, Alexander and Yevdokia in Leningrad. Evsei lived in Minsk region, Zalman and Sarah stayed in Cherven with their families. Grandmother Ester had no permanent place of residence: she lived with each of her children in turns. During the war she was evacuated to Kazan with Evsei and Miron's families. She passed away there at the end of the war, around 1943-44.

My father's parents were religious. Their native language was Yiddish. Those of their children who stayed in Cherven also, as they followed Jewish traditions. Miron also followed some of the

traditions (according to my scattered memories), but those who became komsomolki and party "chieftains", as well as the younger generation, already, of course, assimilated and became atheist.

My father, Israil Mikhailovich Maron, was born in 1905 in the “settlement” of Cherven, in Belarus. He had a secondary education, finishing school in Chechersk. He was known for his unusual charm and desire to help any person in need. He might even take off his last shirt. He was a singer and dancer, taking part in a drama circle before the war (until 1939). For his role as Platon Krechet in Minsk he received first prize in a folk art contest: a bicycle. He read Apukhtina beautifully, sang songs, and was a very wise and sociable person, loved by women. He was the representative for the first agricultural commune in the village of Edinstvo, Chechersk region, and was injured by bandits.

In the end of the 1920’s the peasants sent him to Kirov for help, probably because he dealt with agricultural machines, which were made in Petersburg. He came to the audience and directed the conversation so well that Kirov offered him a place in Petersburg. My father refused, however, saying that he was needed more in the village. Kirov fulfilled the peasants’ request and even helped my father out in his personal affairs.

The fact was that my sister Bronislava was born with congenital dislocation of the hip. It wasn’t immediately noticed only when she began to walk and limp. At the age of two, Father took her to Gomel, but there they refused to perform such a difficult operation. When my parents and sister returned from Gomel, bandits set their house on fire at night. They jumped out the window, Papa, barefoot with Broni wrapped in his shirt and in his arms. Kirov gave Father an opening at the military medical academy, where they performed an operation that was, for that time, unique. Mama was there with her and slept under her bed at night. During the day Mama helped to take care of the sick, feeding them, cleaning and washing on the floor. When Bronislava was studying at the Leningrad Medical Institute, a professor told the class during an orthopedics lecture about an unique operation done in 1929 on a two year old girl named Bronislava Maron. Bronislava stood up and said that she was that girl.

After party-economic study, Father became the head of the finance department in Chechersk. He was the undisputed authority for his comrades and colleges. In 1939-40 he was sent to do party work in the city of Belostoksk Region. He planned to get settled and bring over his family but didn’t get to it, the war interfered. Four days before the start of the war, accurately diagnosing the conditions at the border, he sent Mama a telegram: “hold off your arrival.” Father perished on the very first day of the war, when he carried party archives during bombing: a bomb landed on his car. They were to have taken the archive to the Osovi fort. His co-worker, Katz, who he sent for from Chechersk, was a witness. However, a bomb also fell on Katz’s car; he was injured and captured. He then escaped and got back to our side. All those who escaped with him were sent to a penal battalion, but her was sent to Siberia. He was asked, “how could you, a Jew, have survived?” From prison he returned sick and broken. My father was listed “missing in action.”

Of my father’s brothers and sisters, we were closest to uncle Miron (1898-1973). He and Father were very good friends. His real name was Mote Maron, he changed it to Miron Goldberg in order to escape the draft during the civil war. I’m not aware of the details of this story. Miron graduated from some sort of technical school and was an expert in timber marking. He came to work in Zagore with grandfather Borukh. There he met Hannah, the daughter of the brother of my

grandmother Mera. They were married and had a son, Yosif. After the evil murder of their nine-month-old first-born during the pogrom in May of 1922, Hannah was ill for a long time. Miron punished the killers, he took part in their capture. After the pogrom, they moved to Chechersk.

Miron was tall, handsome and known for great physical strength. He could lift a horse alone. All the bandits of the region were afraid of him. One day, when he was carrying wages to the forestry area, bandits in the forest set him upon. He grabbed both of them and cracked their heads together so hard that one died immediately and the other lay senseless until the police came for him.

In Chechersk Miron worked at the timber mill in the village of Krasnii Bereg. When his first wife died, Miron, left with three children on his hands, married again. His second wife, Bassya, was a miraculous person: she took the place of the children's mother. She had a son, Grisha, from her first marriage, but she and Miron had no children together.

When the war began, Miron organized a division of self-defense in Chechersk, in which his son Yakov took part. However, when the Germans came to Gomel, the division disbanded and most of its fighters joined the partisan division. Miron ended up in the trudarmy (worker's army) as an expert in forestry (processing and timber felling) and was sent to Kuybeishev where he worked during the entire war. Yakov was evacuated with us, and the rest of Miron's family left even earlier for his brother Evsei's in Kazan.

After the war Miron took his family to Kuybeishev, but he missed his birthplace and after some time he returned to Chechersk with his family. He was the director of the timber factory in the village of Krasnii Bereg. His daughter Sofia graduated from the Minsk Pedagogical Institute and worked in a secondary school in Chechersk. Yakov graduated from the Moscow Forestry Technical School and worked in the city of Kalinin (now Tver) in a forestry building expedition. Klara graduated from the Leningrad Pedagogical Institute and worked in Kamensk-Uralsuk. She still lives there, is ill and has buried her husband, son, and many relatives. She calls herself the 'burial crew.'

Bassya, Miron's wife, was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Chechersk according to Jewish traditions. In Miron's family they followed tradition more than in the families of our other relatives. Sofia, Miron's daughter, is also buried there. Miron died in 1973 in Gomel, while living with his third wife. Even though Miron and my father Israil were very close, after my father's death Miron never helped us. Money was sent to us by Evsei, who had five children of his own. Evsei Maron (1905-1992) was the director of a boarding school for troubled youth near Minsk, comparable to the labor colony in Makarenko, before the war. After the war he was the director of a secondary school in Kazan.

I don't know when father's brother Zalman and sister Sarah were born. I only know that during the war the Nazis shot Zalman, his wife and two young sons as well as Sarah, her husband Nolaima and their three children in Chechersk in 1942. Father's sister Evdokiya (1912-1976) lived in Leningrad. She had no specified education, and worked as the head of the store of artifacts from the North Pole expeditions. Her twin brother Alexander (1912-1957) also lived in Leningrad. He was an economist, taught at the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute (LPI) and was a lecturer-internationalist along with the very famous Solonniki. During each lecture two stenographers worked in order to record each word of the lectrer and answers to the questions. In 1952-53, in one of Alexander

Maron's lectures, a provocative question was asked that he however answered truthfully. After this he was removed from lecturing and fired from his job. He was unemployed for a long time. In 1957 he died from a stroke.

Yanka (Anna) Maron (1902-1974) lived in Leningrad and Moscow, and she was the wife of a public prosecutor. She was uneducated, but she was a strong and wise person. According to Yakov Goldberg's daughter Anna, when her father, in 1945, arrived in Moscow accompanied by a nurse, with a shot-up arm and shrapnel in his head, he thought, "who needs and invalid?" That was what a 20-year-old thought; he believed that life was over for him. He called Yanka and she convinced him with her humor and life strength that all wasn't so bad, seeing as he was still alive. Her own older son, Volodya, was killed near Leningrad. "Volodya has it worse," she said. Yakov was helped and supported as much as Yanka could. Yanka's second son, Boris Perchanok, my cousin, now lives in St. Petersburg. He graduated from LPI and was the head of the vibration laboratory at the "Electrosila" factory. We see each other. His wife Nellie is a volunteer at Hesed. They often attend events at Hesed.

My mother, Galina Borukhovna Maron, was born in 1907 in the village of Zagore, Chechersk uyezd [district]. Her personality differed from my Father's. She was also a very kind and charming person, but quiet, home-loving. She sewed well but didn't take part in any sewing circles. Her looks were very modest, differing from Father. She was born into a religious family where Jewish traditions were observed. Before the revolution she and her brother studied at Hebrew school, then in secondary school in Chechersk. She graduated from the Chechersk agricultural school. She was an accountant by specialty. My parents met in the village of Zagore, where Mama lived with her parents and Papa visited his brother Miron. When, after the pogrom, both families moved to Chechersk, Mama and Papa dated there and in 1926 were married. They lived in one big house with grandmother Mera, mother's mother. Both my sisters and I were born in Chechersk.

When the war began, Mama, along with us, was evacuated first to Stalingrad region, then to Omsk region. At the station Moskalennaya in Omsk region, she worked as head accountant for the Moskalennaya "raipotrebsoyus" (regional union of consumers). In 1947 there was a money reform. The workers of the raispotrebsoyus were mobilized to help the sberkass [the state bank] workers exchange money. One of the workers invited my mother to have some of the money that the kazakhs were bringing in, as they brought it in in sacks and didn't count it. Mama replied that her obtaining happiness through another's suffering was impossible. Then that woman, afraid that Mama would tell on her, accused Mama herself.

At that time, because of the request of the wife of the first secretary of the raikom [regional committee], a special commission arrived to investigate the constant drunkenness of regional workers in the cafeteria. Mama was taken in for questioning. She didn't take part in these parties, but she was questioned because she had signed for the wine. She answered, "I'm not stupid, I know that wine isn't poured, it is drunk." When they arrested several people from the group who had taken part in the cover-up of the drinking in the cafeteria, Mama wasn't taken.

She was taken (as was later discovered) after that woman's accusation on June 18th. Papa sent a telegram in which he told us to wait before coming [to him at the border]. Mama told no one about this during the war, but when there was conversation [at work] about the fact that the money reform existed because there had been a war and there was a war because the Germans

unexpectedly attacked, Mama corrected them, saying that her husband knew. She meant [that he knew about the beginning of the war], if he warned us not to come, that there were traitors in the government [this was in the denouncement]. And on that same day Mama was arrested.

This fact wasn't brought up at the trial, and therefore she wasn't given a major sentence, but they managed to expel me from school as the daughter of politically unreliable parents. This, even though I was a ninth grader and in the komsorgom [leader of the all-Union Leninist Communist Youth League] of the school. My younger sister, studying in second grade, wasn't touched.

Mama was found guilty of statute 109 – negligent relationship to her responsibility at work. This charge carried 9 years in prison. She was given 8. She was put in a colony near Omsk along with political prisoners. When she returned in 1953, she told me that she had met such people and understood more of her life than she had ever before. There were very many Jews there as well. Mother's kindness helped her even in jail. She was assigned a to a cell with criminals and was chosen as the head of the cell, as someone always kind and correct. Mother was freed during the amnesty after Stalin's death -- she only served six years. The charges against her were dropped. She returned to Chechersk and began working as an accountant-cashier for the village shop.

Before the war there was no anti-Semitism in Chechersk. I know this form my parents and grandmother. No one even had an understanding of this. It began to appear with the war. Mama ran into it immediately. She was hired because she was well known both as a specialist and as a good person. Then the representative of the 'raipotrebsoyus'[regional consumers' union] changed and she was instantly fired. She was the only Jew in the group. Her colleges loved her and went to plead for her, but could do nothing. Mama said to that person in the face "you're a fascist." As it turns out, she was correct. Several years later he traveled to some meeting in Western Belarus and there a woman recognized him as a member of the police. Not only that, he also took part in the execution of Jews. He was immediately arrested. So Mama was right, but he had fired her and she worked in a kindergarten, and then got sick and was forced to leave her work.

Her time in jail didn't leave her without a trace. In December 1965 she was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Beltzei Gomeliya region. At that time she lived with her younger daughter Anna in Gomel. Mama undressed and, in one robe and felt boots on the wrong feet, went walking in the winter and began to tear up her documents. She was terrified that she might have done something to her documents and she'd be put back in prison. Mama was then put in the hospital. I, at that time, was at the sanatorium. When Anya called me to say that Mama was ill, the director of the hospital let me out with the right to return when I had sorted things out. When Anya opened the door for me, she suddenly fainted on the doorstep -- she was that scared. Mama was released in April and she left for Ust-Kammenogorsk and Bronislava. We had decided that Bronya, as a doctor, was the best one to help Mama. There were periodic worsenings of her sickness and Bronislava determined her course of treatment. Mama died in 1973. She had contracted gangrene and her leg was amputated, then she passed away. I was also sick at that time, and I wasn't told that Mama had died for 2 years.

Mama had a sister, Fira and a brother Emmanuil. Nine-year-old Fira was murdered during the pogrom in Zagore in 1922. Emmanuil and Mama were saved from the pogrom. My uncle Monya [Emmanuil] was born in Zagore in 1910. He loved horses very much. His father often brought him along on his work in forestry. Both rode very well. Monya grew up very active and mischievous,

often playing tricks and offending his quiet sister, my mother. Their father Borukh often had to ‘deal with’ his son because of this. After their father’s horrifying death during the pogrom, Mama wept and said, “ now there is no one to defend me.” And her 12-year-old brother swore to help and defend her until his very death. This promise he kept. All his life he helped his sister and her children, especially when Mama landed in prison.

In 1930 Emmanuil graduated from the metallurgy school in Gomel and in 1931 he was drafted into the army after finishing summer school. After the army service, he worked in a factory in Leningrad, then was an instructor at the raikom [regional committee] of the komsomol for Kuibeishev region. In 1938, due to a komsomol pass, he became the head of the Vkusprom light industry of Leningrad that repaired all the food production factories in the city. During the war he served in the headquarters of the aviation communication for the Leningrad front. In 1946 he wad demobilized as a major and then was the director of sewing factory #5. Because he spent his whole life helping Mama and his sister’s family, he only allowed himself to get married at the age of 42, when I was already studying at the institute. Two years later, in 1955, he died of complications of a heart attack. It turned out that he didn’t even have decent clothes for the funeral. He bought himself a winter coat only a year before his death. He is buried in the Transformation Jewish cemetery in Leningrad.

There were two secondary schools: a large Belarussian school and a smaller Russian one. I studied in the Belarussian school, which was located in the former estate of Prince Potemkin’s niece, Countess Bezobrazova. Around this lovely building there was a very well kept park.

During the war

When the war began at the end of August 1941, we left Chechersk on foot, as the railroad was 60 km from the city. Part of the way we traveled by horse, part we hitchhiked, even in military vehicles. The group that left was as follows: grandmother, mother, me, my sisters and Yasha, Papa’s brother Miron’s son. Papa was at this time near Belostok. We arrived at the evacuation point in Gomel, which was the goods station of the Gomel railroad, under constant bombing. There we lost Anya. She had been frightened by the bombing, sat down on the ground and hid herself in some sort of garden, between the plots. We all jumped, called for her, all around us people were yelling, bombs were exploding and it was impossible to hear anything. Suddenly we saw that some man had raised his hands up high, and in them was holding our Anya. We were so thankful! We were evacuated to the village of Dobrinka-on-Hopr in Stalingrad region. There my mother worked and we went to school. The residents welcomed us well. Yasha graduated from secondary school there, and then left for the front. When the Germans began to encircle Stalingrad, we were evacuated to Siberia, to the station Moskalenniya in Omsk region. Mama worked there as an accountant.

Grandmother and Anya, in 1948, returned to Chechersk and I remained in Moskalenniya. I lived with the parents of my sister’s friend for a year and sent Mama letters. When the trial was held in 1949 and Mama was convicted, I returned to Chechersk.

In Chechersk I was afraid to go to school, thinking that here I would also be expelled because of my mother. My cousin, Clara Goldberg, Uncle Miron’s daughter, came over one day and said that the

director of the school, Dubrovskii, wanted to speak with me. During the war Dubrovskii had been the commander of a group of partisans in the woods of Belarus. He told me, “I knew your father well, and your mother. They are good and decent people. You will go, right now, to class, sit at your desk and you will study like the rest. And you won’t tell anyone anything about your mother.” And so I did. In school the kids made me feel welcome. Our group of friends was international: Jews and Belarussians. I didn’t notice any sort of adverse reactions from my Belarussian friends. There were many Jews in our group because a large number of Jewish families had returned to Chechersk from evacuation.

All the Jews that had stayed in Chechersk perished. The Germans had rounded them all up and put them in the town hall. One of the guards warned them that the next day they would all be shot, and one ten-year-old girl managed to escape. They were shot and thrown into one of the anti-tank ditches that the residents had dug for the defense of Chechersk. In a second such ditch lie gypsies killed by the Germans. Their graves are located at the entrance to Chechersk on the Lysukha Mountain. In 1943 a memorial was placed there.

The Germans burnt down the synagogue and destroyed the Jewish cemetery. The people in the town didn’t light fires, but many houses burned down during the bombings because they were made of wood. Our home also burnt down, and after the war we lived in a little house that Uncle Emmanuil, mother’s brother, bought for us. The brother of Akulina, our former housekeeper, brought us some of our prewar things: pillows, towels, tablecloths and other things. Our house didn’t burn down immediately (it burned because of other houses). We ran behind the cemetery and Akulina’s brother rode up on horseback to take us to his house. He broke down our door, went into the house and saved a few things. That’s what people were like at that time.

After the war

It was difficult to study at school after the war because there were few textbooks. All the schoolbooks were sorted in such a way that each student in the class knew at what time he was to come to class. The textbooks were handed to each other in a chain. We read quite a lot in our free time. Books were passed on in the same fashion. My favorite teacher was the literature teacher, Rykunov. He was a unique person and teacher. How much he gave to us! In Chechersk at that time it was difficult to obtain books. In those days Yesenin was forbidden - we first heard of Yesenin through him. We would gather at his home. He told us a great deal, even quoting texts from memory. He could have paid with his job and diploma for reading Yesenin’s poetry.

At that time the movement to help the elderly and those who were left alone after the war was very widespread. We helped them as much as we could. The youth split wood, in the fall they helped to harvest potatoes, and in the spring they helped to plant them. We were also sent out to the collective farms to gather the harvest. We also took part in amateur artistic performances and often performed concerts for the farmers in the fields of the collective farms. In addition to this, our class rebuilt our school, which had been turned into a stable by the Germans. We temporarily studied at the Russian school. We worked all summer on the repair of our school, traveled to the forest, and prepared building materials. We were taken to plots of land, slept in peasant houses with the residents of the village Krasnii Bereg.

In tenth grade I was chosen as the secretary of the school komsomol. As a result, many years later, in the 1980's, I was invited to our school's anniversary. I was told that the members of the anniversary commission were very interested in meeting with their former classmates and teachers, but the greatest gift for me was seeing Dubrovskii, who had given me a path in life. At the time of that meeting almost no Jews were left in Chechersk. Some had left for Israel, some for America and some, because of high radiation after the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, for Gomel (there apartments had been offered).

In 1950 I graduated from school and left for Leningrad to enter the Pedagogical Institute named after Gertzen. I wanted to continue Rykunov's work and teach literature at school. However, in Leningrad great disappointment awaited me. Here anti-Semitism was already widespread. An acquaintance of my uncle's, who worked as the assistant head of the publishing house of the Academy of Science, interviewed me. He explained to me that there were "conditions whereby Jews shouldn't be allowed to university in general, including the literature department of the pedagogical institute as 'Jews can't teach Russian literature." The history department was also better left forgotten, and I turned my documents in to the geography department. This was a great loss for me, but I couldn't risk anything as Mama was in jail. On the advice of my relatives, I hid that fact, saying that I was an orphan. My father truly did die in 1941, and about Mama I kept silent. In those days there were many orphans and no one was interested in checking out the facts. My documents were accepted. The fact that I came from an agricultural settlement also played a role, as it was fashionable at that time to accept such students in the Pedagogical Institute.

A Leningrad Jewish girl, Zhenya Vilenchik, with whom I became friends at the institute, had her documents returned to her at first on the pretext that there was a serious competition! Only the resistance of her father, an honored war veteran, who went to the rector and promised to "deal with" this question in Moscow, had any effect. Zhenya was and remains my best friend. She is very small. I sat next to her and said "let's be friends. You're little, and I'm big. I'll defend you." In fact everything turned out the other way around.

Zhenya had a wonderful, intelligent, Jewish family into which I was taken as a member. There were always many visitors there, especially young people -- friends of Zhenya and her younger sister. Zhenya's mother always placed a saucer of sweet biscuits on the table, as I remember. I also recall one conversation. One day Zhenya's mother was feeling sorry for me as an orphan. I then told her that I have a mother, but that she had been jailed in Siberia. She sat in silence, then said, "you can tell Zhenya about this, she'll never tell anyone anything, but better not to tell her sister about it. " I continued to be friends with Zhenya after graduating from the Institute. I met my future husband in her home, he was one of her sister's friends.

When I graduated from the Institute I was sent to work as a geography teacher in the city of Tikhvin, Leningrad region. It was an "out-of-the-way place" where there were many Russian devout pilgrims. At that time I had many followers, the truest of which was Sasha Nikitin, a Russian by nationality. My uncles Monya and Zhenya really wanted me to marry a Jew, and were against Sasha. Then something happened. Sasha was sent to work in Berlin. He said in Moscow that he was in love with a Jewish girl and was told that in that case his appointment was withdrawn. When I heard that, I stopped seeing him.

At this time Mark, my future husband, returned to Leningrad after finishing the Minsk Higher Military School and we once again began to date. (We had dated earlier.) We celebrated New Year's Eve together at Zhenya's and were soon married. We had a daughter, Emma. I followed the fate of all officers' wives. My husband's mother was also the wife of a military officer, and worked at the headquarters as a nurse in the hospital. She was evacuated to Kamensk-Ufimsk. Mark's father was a soldier in the regular army. From the first days of the war he was with the navy airforce, and was demobilized in 1955 as a lieutenant colonel. He was then the director of an artisan craft factory in Leningrad.

I worked as a geography teacher, and if there was no place as a teacher, I agreed to any sort of work. I was even the head of a library, giving lectures to soldiers. In 1966 I was hospitalized with the diagnosis of terminal "necrosis of the pancreatic glands." I went through a unique operation, but I refused the invalid status and went back to school. I worked in the school for 22 years.

Because of my husband retired from the military, we returned to Leningrad, but there was no place there for us to live. I worked as a resident advisory in a dormitory, and he at the executive committee. After obtaining living quarters, I worked as a cloakroom attendant at the "Buff" theatre. First it was a temporary summer job, but when a post opened up, the director of the theatre refused to hire me. He said that he had too many Jews working at the theatre (directors and actors). I was hired as a watchman for the administration of the Lenkomcenter where, at that time, only Jews worked. After the director of the "Buff" theatre was fired (the troupe was instrumental in this), I returned there. I retired from the theatre in 1987. I was sent off warmly and touchingly.

Now I will tell you about my sisters. My older sister Bronislava was born in Chechersk on January 4th, 1927. She graduated from the 1st Leningrad Medical Institute in 1951. She was a very good student and she was to be kept on for graduate study. However, this was the time of widespread anti-Semitism and she was turned away. The explanation for refusing her admission was given in a private conversation: nationality - Jewish. She was sent to Kazakhstan, to the city of Ust-Kammenogorsk, where she spent the rest of her life. She worked as a doctor-therapist, then as the assistant head of the department in the 1st City Hospital. She raised two sons. Her older son Igor was born in 1952 and graduated from metallurgical technical school. He works in Ust-Kammenogorsk, at a lead-zinc factory, the same factory where Bronislava's husband worked as a metal worker/ assembler. Her younger son, Alexander, was born in 1954 and became an engineer-builder. Bronislava died in 1982 of cancer. I traveled to take care of her. When I was sick, she had taken care of me. We were very good friends. After his mother's death, in 1996, Sasha (that is, my brother Alexander) left Kazakhstan with his family for Israel. They live in Haifa. His daughter Natasha is serving in the army.

My younger sister Anna, born in 1938, graduated from the Leningrad Technical College of Light Industry as a "mechanic". She was sent to Gomel, where she worked at the base, Oblsnab (regional supply). She married Boris Rafaelovich Hersonskii, a welder. Her son Mikhail born in 1963 and her daughter Irina in 1969. Mikhail graduated from the Gomel Agricultural Institute and works at the Gomel Agricultural Technology factory as an engineer of safety techniques. He is divorced. His daughter and wife live in Israel. Irina is a dental technician. Her daughter Galiya is seven. She is divorced.

My daughter Emma was born in 1995 in Leningrad. After graduating from secondary school the question of where to do further studies had to be answered. I really wanted to believe, while my daughter was growing up and my husband was serving in the army, that she wouldn't have to deal with the problem of anti-Semitism when she entered the institute, but it turned out that little had changed.

In the upper classes of school Emma studied with a very talented boy named Igor Zaer. He won all the physics olympiads in Leningrad. But his health was poor and therefore he had lived with and had been brought up by his grandmother and grandfather until 9th grade, somewhere in the center of Russia. He had been raised to believe that justice is everywhere and that there is no problem with anti-Semitism anywhere in the USSR. He came to Leningrad believing this, and decided, after graduating from school, to enter the Leningrad State University; that was his great dream. Both his parents and his friends tried to talk him out of applying, but he answered that it was all slander. "I don't believe it and I'll be accepted," he said. His documents weren't even taken and this was a blow for him. He tried to enter somewhere else, I don't remember where, with the same result. In the end he entered the Pedagogical Institute, but all this had broken him. He studied for 3 or 4 months, then committed suicide. He left his bag on the Lieini Bridge with his notes and a message, "I don't want to live like this and it cannot be otherwise." He was his parents' only son. That the university was closed for Jews was something that he couldn't get over. His grandmother and grandfather had raised him to believe that we didn't have such a problem, and he turned out to be unprepared to deal with it. It was a horrible shock for all the children at that school, and not only for his class!

My friend Volodya Turzhitzkii, himself an engineer and builder, came to us at home to speak with Emma. I, at that time, was on the eve of my fifth operation and didn't feel well. Volodya said "Emma, builder-plumber - it's not a secret, nor is it the most popular specialty. You can enter that department and then you'll be able to work anywhere." And Emma entered the "engineer of plumbing equipment" major at the Leningrad Institute of Railway Transport Engineering (LIRTE), which she graduated from in 1977.

She worked for about 12 years in construction and was the head of the reconstruction department of the Medical Institute, located in Ligovka. Then she took accounting courses and now works as head accountant for the "Znanye" company, which deals with translations. Emma married her classmate Viktor Pavlov, a Russian by nationality, out of great love, but at the moment they are divorced. She has two sons: Ilya, born in 1979 and Anton, born in 1985. The children are interested in the Jewish question. Anton wanted to go to a Jewish summer camp, but he wasn't given a permission; they said that there were few places and none was left form him. Maybe this has to do with the fact that he is Anton Viktorovich Pavlov, I don't know. We were very bitter over this.

Ilya is a fifth year student at the St. Petersburg State University in the department of low temperature and food technology, studying to be an "engineer – technician of bread, macaroni and confectionery production." He has dreamed of becoming a confectionery specialist since childhood, ruining much food while trying to create something unusual. He is a very talented boy. In 2001, in Krasnodar, a contest was held in confectionery mastery in which 180 Russian companies took part, including the most famous ones, Moscow's 'Praga' and Leningrad's 'Sever'. Ilya, along with his classmates, took part from their institute and won the first place, while 'Praga' and 'Sever' won

only the second and third places. The contest was anonymous, and when their envelope was opened the commission was shocked. They baked a 35 kilo cake and the commission couldn’t guess even one of its components (this was one of the requirements of the contest). The cake was unbelievably delicious, made in the shape of a piece of cheese with a mouse on the top. It was made of cheese, various fruits, souffle, etc. Their institute received the 100,000-ruble prize, and was able to buy much-needed equipment. The kids received medals and diplomas.

My younger grandson, Anton is in 11th grade now, and he will also soon be dealing with the question of applying to an institute.

How do I feel about the emigration of Jews to Israel, America and Western Europe? I think that it is the personal business of each person. I, if I could, would also have sent my daughter and grandsons there. I would have sent them to America, because she was in Israel on an excursion and couldn't handle the hot local climate. Because of her health, she can't deal with heat. Maybe she had already had thoughts about emigration. She traveled there, but when she came back she said, "Mama, I can't handle that heat." We don't have the means to move to America.

The departure of friends is the most bitter page of our modern life; it's like the departure of a part of one's self. We write to each other, call each other when we can. Two of my closest friends are now in America. My Zhenka lives in Chicago. Zhenka [Eugenia Vilemchik] is a second me. She is my conscience and my best friend since September 1st, 1950. She has always been there to help me. Her parents are buried here in the Jewish section of the cemetery to the victims of the 9th of January [1905 Revolution], and now my husband and I take care of their graves, although now my husband does this alone as I am unable to walk. We also care for the graves of our relatives that are buried in the Jewish Transformation Cemetery in Leningrad. Sadly we can no longer get to the Jewish cemetery in Chechersk.

Several years ago I fell and broke my hip, and since then I walk with difficulty, aided by two canes. I don’t leave my house and am often tortured by pain. My husband is very caring and helps me enormously. I have a small pension, 750 rubles [$27], but my husband receives a veteran’s pension because he is a retired major and he continues to work in accordance with his specialty. Therefore we have enough to live on, although I am grateful to Hesed for their care and attention. I had glasses made for me at home, they send me packages, congratulate me on Jewish holidays and send invitations to concerts. At the moment I can’t attend the concerts, but my husband and daughter do. When I could still walk, I watched the Jewish performances at the Krupsky House of Culture. All those who sat in the hall had tears in their eyes.

I am in real need of medicine; each month 500 rubles is spent on them. Hesed has been providing me with reduced-price medicine for three years now. All of this attention, care and help from a Jewish organization really helps one live and cope with difficulties.

My cousin Boris Hananovich Perchansk lives in St. Petersburg. He is the son of my aunt Yana, Papa's sister. Boris has recently become very interested in Jewish traditions. His wife Nellie is a volunteer at Hesed, and he has started to attend, interested in various questions. Last year my sister Anya came from Gomel to visit along with the family of our deceased cousin Grisha (Miron's stepson), and Boris held Passover (Pesach) for us, following all correct Jewish requirements. There was matza on the table and all that was necessary. This was all very moving. I can't say how he

celebrates at home, because I don't leave my house, but Nellie, as a Hesed worker, is present at all holidays and is very interested in these aspects.

Today, with the help of different Jewish organizations, including the Jewish non-profit center "Hesed Avraam," Jewish traditions begin to renew themselves. At Hesed they often present lectures on Jewish traditions, distribute related literature, celebrate Jewish holidays and hold Shabbat on Fridays.