

# Faina Volper Biography

5

Faina Volper lives alone in a two-room apartment in the center of Chernovtsy. She is a short slim woman. She has long white neatly done hair. She wears elegant clothes and makeup and looks younger than her age. She carries herself with ease. She enjoyed talking about her family and life. During the interview Faina recited poems that she remembered from her childhood and sang Jewish songs that she heard from her mother. Faina has a great sense of humor. She takes an active part in Hesed and has quite a few friends there.

My father's family lived in Starokonstantinov, Khmel'nitsk region. My grandfather on my father's side Haim-Usher Volper was born in Starokonstantinov in 1840s. My grandfather died from twisted bowels in 1907. I don't know what he did for a living. All I know is that his family was very poor living from hand to mouth. I remember my grandmother Brukhe, my father's mother. I don't know her nee name. She was born in Starokonstantinov in 1846. I have no information about my grandmother's family. I remember my grandmother slim and straight. She had very smooth face without any wrinkles. She wore a kerchief low on her forehead. She wore a dark skirt and a light polka-dot blouse buttoned up her neck. She also wore a dark apron. My grandmother was a strong-willed and severe woman. She had a hard life.

The majority of population in Starokonstantinov was Jewish. They were mainly handicraftsmen. There were also lawyers and doctors. It was a problem for Jews to get a higher education in the tsarist Russia (1). Jews got along well with the Russian and Ukrainian population of the town. There was no anti-Semitism before the war. There was a synagogue, cheder and Jewish primary school in this town.

My grandmother and grandfather had four sons. The oldest Yukl was born around 1885. The next son Duvid was born around 1888. Then Shmil-Lobe was born in 1891 and my father Lipe, the youngest, was born in 1895.

My father and his brothers studied at cheder. I don't know whether they had any other education, but my father was a very intelligent man. He always helped my sister and me with our homework on mathematics. All brothers in the family learned a profession. Yukl became a shoemaker. He had a wife and three children. Yukl died of some disease in 1940. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Starokonstantinov in accordance with the Jewish traditions. My parents supported Yukl's widow.

The family lived in the Novoye Stroyeniye neighborhood in Starokonstantinov located across the bridge on the Ikopeth River. Their hut with ground floors was on the bank of the river. They were extremely poor. My father told me that they always had matzah at Pesach that they got from richer Jewish family that believed it to be their duty to give matzah to poor families before holiday. My father knew that richer Jews ate matzah with chicken or goose fat - matzah with shmolt (Editor's note: goose fat - on Yiddish) and he dreamed of trying it. His mother dipped pieces of matzah into hot water, sprinkled with salt and gave it to her children. My father believed it to be matzah with shmolt. My grandmother was a very religious woman. She went to synagogue on Saturday and on holidays and lit candles at Shabbat. They only ate kosher food. They spoke Yiddish in their family

and Ukrainian – with their neighbors.

My father and his brothers studied at cheder. I don't know whether they had any other education, but my father was a very intelligent man. He always helped my sister and me with our homework on mathematics.

After the revolution of 1917 a leather shop was opened in Starokonstantinov. My father worked there as logistics specialist. He purchased leather. Later he became Chairman of this shop. He employed his brother Duvid in this shop. Duvid was a worker. Shmil-Lobe worked at the grain storage facility. When the Great Patriotic War began in 1941, Duvid's sons were in the army. His older son Nikolay was in a borderline unit and perished in the first days of the war. Duvid's younger son Leo was at the front. Duvid's wife Nehoma refused to evacuate: she was afraid that Leo would return home and find it empty. Duvid and Nehoma stayed in Starokonstantinov and perished when Germans occupied the town. My uncle Shmil-Lobe returned from evacuation and got his former job at the leather storage facility. He had three children: two sons and a daughter. After the WWII his younger son Mitia was an investigation officer in Drogobych, and his older son Fima was an engineer at the TV factory in Lvov. They are married. Shmil-Lobe's daughter lives in Lvov. Shmil-Lobe died in 1974 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Starokonstantinov.

My mother's family lived in Matsevichi village of Gritsevsk district. There were 20 to 30 Jewish families in this town, but there was a synagogue and cheder in the town. There was also a Ukrainian primary school in the village. Jews in Matsevichi were farmers, handicraftsmen and tradesmen. People had no conflicts and supported one another. There were no Jewish pogroms in the village; only after the revolution gangs came to the village. (Editors note: In 1920s there were many gangs in Ukraine.) Bandits needed food and self-made vodka, food and money and they didn't care whether it was a Jewish or non-Jewish family that they attacked.

My mother's father Shmil Makovetskiy was a rabbi. He came to Matsevichi after finishing his studies in yeshiva. I don't know where he came from. He was born in the late 1860s. I saw his photograph. He was a very handsome man. He had a long well groomed beard. My grandfather was a very religious and reserved man. He perished in 1920, 7 years before I was born and this is all I know about him.

My mother had two older brothers. Her oldest brother Moshe was born in 1893 and Usher was born in 1896. My mother was born on 6 September 1901.

My mother's brothers got a religious education at cheder. My mother studied at home with a teacher from cheder. My mother could read and write in Hebrew and Yiddish. She prayed in Hebrew. She also studied French with another teacher. My mother learned Polish from her friends – daughters of the family of Polish lord living in a mansion not far from their house. My mother's parents were respectable people. Hers was a religious family.

During the Civil war of 1914-1918 the power switched from one military formation to another: from the "green" units (2), white guard (3), Petlura units (4) and others. My mother's brother Usher was married and lived in the vicinity of Starokonstantinov with his family. They were expecting their first baby. Once in 1919 Usher was going home from Starokonstantinov. He met Petlura soldiers. Usher was wearing good boots. The soldiers shot him and took his boots. He was foun on the road in the morning. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Starokonstantinov. Usher's daughter was

born after he died. His wife remarried and kept out of touch with our family.

My mother's brother Moshe left Matsevichi for Nikolaev in 1916. He had a wife – Dobtsia and four children. He was a driver. My mother's brothers and their families were religious people. They observed traditions and went to synagogue.

My grandfather perished in 1920. Three Polish horse riders came to his house once. My grandmother gave them some food and talked with them in Polish. The Polish men were pleased with the reception. They thanked my grandparents and left. My grandfather went outside. He needed to climb to the attic. One of these Polish men turned back and shot my grandfather in his head, probably for no reason. My grandfather was in his early 50s when he perished. Many Jews came to his funeral. He was buried according to Jewish tradition at the Jewish cemetery.

I remember my grandmother Tsyrl on my mother's side. My grandmother was born in Matsevichi in 1860s. She was a short and fat woman. She was wearing a wig. I asked my mother why my grandmother was wearing a wig and my mother told that such was a rule for a rabbi's wife. It was a nicely combed wig with a lock on the forehead. My grandmother always wore long dark dresses with long sleeves and many small buttons. She was a very nice and kind woman. She always had a smile on her face.

My father came to Matsevichi on business looking for sheepskin. He saw my mother incidentally and fell in love with her. At that time my mother was meeting with a nice Jewish young man. He was a shy man, while my father was a troubleshooter. Girls like men like my father and my mother preferred him. My father began to make passes to my mother coming to the village more often than his business required. He met with her parents and they liked him, too. My parents got married in 1919 and my mother moved to Starokonstantinov. They had a traditional wedding with a huppah. My grandfather – the rabbi – conducted the wedding ceremony with a huppah at the synagogue. They had a small wedding party and my parents moved to their lodging that they were renting until my father received an apartment where my family lived before the war and where I was born. It was half a house and another half was occupied by another family. We had two rooms and a kitchen. There was a small yard with a flower garden and few fruit trees.

Starokonstantinov was a patriarchal town. Men went to work and women stayed at home. There were no jobs for women in the town. Our neighbor Lvovskiy left his wife and she couldn't find a job even though she was an accountant by education. She and her children didn't have any income and lived on what wealthier families were giving them. Wealthier families felt it their duty to support poor people. Jews always understood that they needed to support each other. Brotherhood of blood is like brotherhood of faith. Everybody had to share what one had with others. My mother was helping our neighbor Libe Shluger bringing her hala bread and fish every Saturday. There was another woman – Rivke. She was very sickly and other Jews supported her.

My mother was a housewife. On 29 December 1920 my older sister Esther-Molke - she was called Fira all her life, was born. I was born on 10 January 1927. I was named Faina. There was another boy between me and Faina, but he died shortly after he was born.

Before I was born there was a big fire in my grandmother Tsyrl's house. My grandmother had severe burns especially troublesome on one leg. The wounds didn't heal and my parents took my

grandmother to their house to look after her. When I was two years old gangrene developed on my grandmother's leg. My father took her to hospital in Shepetovka - there were more skilled doctors there than in Starokonstantinov. The doctors told my father that my grandmother needed to have her leg amputated, but my grandmother refused from surgery. She died at our home in 1929.

After my grandmother Tsyrl died my father took his mother Brukhe to our home. My grandmother didn't do any housework. She sat on a bench in the yard talking with neighbors. Her sons - my father's brothers - often visited her. My grandmother Brukhe had strict looks, but she was very kind to us. She gave me my favorite toy of my childhood - a wooden box with a chain inside. My mother made me a doll and I used to put it to bed in the box. My mother and father spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian - to my sister and me. However, we understood Yiddish and spoke Yiddish to our mother sometimes. My grandmother Brukhe only spoke Yiddish. At 80 my grandmother fell ill with pneumonia, but she recovered all right. One afternoon in 1933 she said to my mother that she would take a nap. My father was at work. My grandmother went to take a nap on the sofa, turned with her face to the wall and died quietly. She was 87 and I was 6 years old.

My mother was a very hardworking and handy housewife. She kept her house clean and fixed our clothing. We didn't keep any livestock before the war, because we could afford to buy meat. My father provided well for our family and we could buy everything we needed. My mother made our dresses herself from cheap fabrics: marquisette and cotton. She also made my father's shirts and underpants. We had a general cleanup on Friday. My mother gave me a goose feather to dust the rooms. I also washed floors and dishes. My older sister didn't do any housework. My mother never forced us to do anything in the house. I joined her voluntarily, but my sister was very fond of reading and never offered any help, but my mother didn't tell her anything about it.

There was a stove in the kitchen. My mother cooked on it on Friday when she had to make food for two days. On other days my mother did her cooking on a three-legged stove. My mother cooked traditional Jewish food: chicken broth, Jewish borsch, buckwheat and stewed meat. There was chicken and goose meat on the table. My mother also baked pastries.

My mother was very religious, but my father was an atheist. He wasn't a communist, but he demonstrated his negative attitude towards religion. My mother started Shabbat on Friday evening lighting candles. She didn't do any work on Saturday. She didn't even strike a match on Saturday. Our neighbor came to us to start a fire in the stove. My father, vice a versa, took a cigarette so why the neighbors had to come - because it is forbidden for a Jew to do any work on Saturday, rode his bicycle in the town enjoying himself - he did it demonstratively to show his independence. My mother hated it, but she was a wise woman and kept her temper. My father was a devoted husband and father and my mother avoided any scandals. On Friday morning my mother got up at 5 in the morning. She started baking pies: lekah, knyshyks and kihl. Lekah is honey cake. Kihl - rolls and knyshyks are pies with cereal or jam. Cereal stuffing was rice or millet pudding with milk. Knyshyks with Keiz are small pies with cottage cheeses and stewed onions. She made hala bread and twisted buns - popolkes. My father liked to have them with goose fat. My mother had all bakery done before my father had to leave for work. She also had dinner for Saturday stored in the oven. Our mother told us about the history and traditions of the Jewish people. She wanted to raise us religious.

My mother went to synagogue on holidays, but my father didn't go to synagogue before the WWII. At Pesach we didn't have any bread at home. We only had matzah. When the Soviet authorities started persecution of religious people (5) matzah was made in secret in a house and while it was made the house was guarded by Jewish men. Before Pesach my mother got a box with fancy dishes for Pesach from the attic. A woman came to our house to clean and wash our everyday dishes on the bank of the river where she scrubbed all dishes and bowls with sand and washed in the floating water. Then this kitchenware was taken to the attic. My mother always followed kashrut. The rabbi in our town, a very religious man, visited Jewish families asking them whether they needed help. He was treated to food in their houses, but he refused to eat, but when my mother treated him he accepted with pleasure, confident that all kosher rules had been observed properly.

At Pesach my mother cooked traditional food: chicken broth, Gefilte fish and chicken necks stuffed with liver and flour. She made borsch and had goose fat. Besides, my mother made pancakes from matzah and eggs and potato pancakes. She ground potatoes and washed out the starch liquid that wasn't kosher to make potato pancakes. My mother also made sponge cake from matzah flour. My mother made farfel hollow buns that she fried in chicken fat. My father and I also liked soaked matzah mixed with goose fat and fried. It was delicious.

My father always conducted Seder at Pesach. We were sitting on special pillows as required by the rules. According to the Seder rules the first dinner at Pesach has to be taken reclining on pillows to sit comfortable and enjoy the meal. My father said a prayer and my mother sang a song. My sister and I asked questions and our father answered them. We didn't understand a word of what we were saying, repeating all words after our father.

At Yom Kippur and before Rosh Hashanah the family fasted. Our father also fasted. We sat at the table after our mother returned from the synagogue in the evening. I didn't go to the synagogue. Authorities were struggling against religion and mother thought it was better for me to stay at home. My mother told me that it was a two-storied building with men sitting on the first floor and women sitting on the 2nd floor. My mother said such was a rule to have attendants of synagogue concentrate on the prayer. I also remember Kapores that my mother arranged before Yom Kippur. She bought white hens for my sister, herself and me and a rooster for our father. After the prayer we took a bird turning it over our heads saying "May you be my atonement" in Hebrew. Later my mother took these chickens to the synagogue where they were given to poor people.

At Purim my mother made gomentashy, triangle pies with poppy seeds and nuts. She also made poppy seed cookies. It was a tradition to take shalahmones (treatments) to relatives. We also celebrated Sukkoth, the harvest holiday, in the family. Our acquaintances had a sukkah in their yard and we came to them to sit in their Sukkah. After the prayer we sat at the table. I stayed at the table for a short while before my mother told me to go home, because it was cold.

There was a big market in Starokonstantinov on Sundays. Early in the morning my mother went to the road to buy chicken from the farmers that were taking their product to the market. My mother could buy chickens from them at a lower price. She took live chicken to the shoihet. There was no kosher meat at the market, because the sellers at the market were Ukrainian farmers. However, director of the meat factory was a Jew and there was a kosher shop at the factory and from there we had beef delivered home.

1932 and 1933 were the years of famine (6). We survived thanks to our storage of millet and buckwheat. My mother knew many farmers that sold their products at the market in Starokonstantinov. When they came to the market they dropped by our house to say “hallo” to my mother and always brought her a bag of cereal. That was how we got a storage of cereals. My mother made soup with cereals and shared it with my father’s brother Duvid and his wife Nehama. Duvid was all swollen from hunger and Nehama was so weak that she had to stay in bed. Duvid came to us to have a bowl of soup and took a jar of soup to Nehama. We all survived this famine when so many people around had starved to death.

My older sister Fira went to the Jewish school near our house, but in few days my mother took her to the Ukrainian school. My mother didn’t like it that my sister’s schoolmates were dirty and snotty children from poor religious families. Ukrainian school was more progressive at that time, besides, my mother wanted my sister to study the state language. My mother taught my sister and me to read and write in Yiddish, but that was all we studied.

I went to school in 1933 when I was 6 years old. I wanted to go to school, even though I was too young for it. I had a friend - Sopha Galperina. She was one year older than I and it was time for her to go to school. I missed her and kept nagging about her letting me go to school. My mother and I went to director of the Ukrainian school. When he heard that I was 6 years old he told me to come to school in another year. We went home, but I lost appetite and my mother became very concerned about it. She promised me to let me go to school with Sopha if I ate my breakfast promptly. During classes I stayed outside waiting for an interval when I could play with other children. Once a teacher noticed that I was outside the classroom. She asked me what I was doing there and I told her honestly that I was eager to study. She asked me whether I could read and write. I knew letters and could read. She checked what I knew and took me to the class. There were long desks for 10 pupils in this class. The teacher gave me a sheet of paper and a pencil. I did everything other pupils did. Perhaps, I was not so good at it, but I enjoyed going to school. My teacher talked to director to give me a chance at school and he agreed. By the end of the first form I had the best grades. There were 5 or 6 Ukrainian children in my class and the rest of us were Jewish children. We studied all subjects in Ukrainian.

When I was in the first form in 1933 we had a meeting dedicated to an anniversary of Lenin’s death. I went to school with Sopha and her mother. I had a big ribbon in my hair. My mother taught me a poem “Hard sorrow” about Lenin’s death. Sopha’s mother put me on a chair on the stage and announced that I would recite a poem. I recited it pathetically and was a great success. People applauded me for a long time. I can still remember this poem:

Why are you crying, Mama? What’s happened?

Why is there black cloth on flags? And where are the people hurrying?

- Why am I crying, my little one? Lenin died, our Illich,

The one that was the first to call for freedom.

And the little one burst into tears: Mama, shall we go to him?

- We shall go there with other people to say “farewell” to Illich.

I became a young Octobrist and then a pioneer at school. I took it very seriously.

I remember how happy I was to become a pioneer. We became pioneers at school on the birthday of Lenin in April at age of 10 years. Senior pioneers tied red neckties on us and we pronounced a



pioneer oath. I saluted everybody on this day.

I was a very shy girl and as quiet as a mouse. However, I took an active part in public life of our school. I was a senior pioneer in my class and later became a member of the pupil's committee at school. I was a disciplined pupil and believed it to be my duty to participate in all pioneer activities.

In 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. My parents often talked about fascism and extermination of Jews in Germany, in the end of 1930s, but it seemed to be so distant from our country and our life. When I turned 10 or 11 years old I borrowed a book from the library – it was entitled "Trial", but I don't remember the author, I only remember that he was a Czech. The book was about tortures of Jews in Germany when Hitler came to power.

I got along well with my schoolmates, but had one close friend – Sarrah Kaluzhnaya she was Jewish girl. Later her family moved to Odessa.

I didn't have to spend much time doing my homework. I remembered all I heard in class. I always had the highest grades at school. I had a lot of free time and decided to study music. I had classes with a private teacher, our neighbor. We didn't have a piano. My father was reluctant to buy one. Those were fearful years and he wanted to be no different from other people. It was better to attract no attention of other people anything that might cause interest or envy. I had classes at my teacher's home. Later my class tutor Sophia Efimovna became my teacher. We had a piano in our class.

We celebrated Jewish and Soviet holidays at home: 7 November, 1 May and New Year, and birthdays. We had big celebrations at school. We made concerts, sang songs and danced.

1936 was a horrible period of arrests (7). My father was the only man left in our street – the others were arrested. We didn't discuss this subject at home. I think my parents understood what was going on. Our neighbors – a very poor Jewish family with 3 children – had a horse and a cart. The father of the family collected waste paper and rags in the neighboring villages for his living. Every morning at 6 o'clock Yankel left his yard on a cart while urging his horse with a "yer-yer!" call. One morning I didn't hear his familiar voice. My mother told me that he was arrested the previous night. I was 9 years old and every night before going to sleep I said a prayer "Dear Lord, help my father, don't let him be arrested". I prayed in my own words in Russian – I didn't remember any prayers in Yiddish. God kept my father safe.

In 1937 my sister finished school and entered Medical Institute in Kharkov. She lived in a hostel. Once she fell ill and my mother went to look after her. My father didn't cook at home. I came to his work and we went to the restaurant. We had pork chops that were delicious. We never had pork at home. We never told mother about it – she wouldn't have appreciated it.

WWII began on 1 September 1939. My classmate Kaminskiy had a Jewish mother and a Polish father. His mother was a military and she was sent to Poland. When his mother returned she brought her son a pen that was rare at that time. Her son shared a desk with me and he gave me this pen. When I went to see him at his home, his mother told us what it was like in Poland when Germans came. They began mass extermination of Jews. It didn't even occur to us that Hitler would dare to attack our country.

In the 5th form in 1938 we began to attend military classes. We were taught what we had to do in case of air raid and to provide assistance to the wounded. Patriotic propaganda was very strong and slogans "For Stalin! For our Motherland!" reached even our subconsciousness.

In the morning of 22 June 1941 I was alone at home. Jews had a tradition to meet in the central square on Sunday morning to talk and discuss various subjects. It was an old tradition. They were people of all ages and religiosity. They were Jewish and non-Jewish. They came to be together and discuss subjects that interested them. My father went to the square and my mother and Fira went to the market. My sister finished her 4th year at the Institute and was home on vacation. I was washing the floor when my father came in and said "It's a war!" I turned on the radio and we listened to Molotov's speech (8).

On Sunday we had a rehearsal of our drama club at school. Regardless of my fear I went to school. Our tutor sent me back home. She was my favorite teacher Sophia Efimovna, a Jewish woman. Her destiny was horrific. I heard her story when I returned from evacuation. Her sons David and Rafael were in the army. Sophia refused to evacuate saying "Why do I need this life if my children were taken to the war..." Her sons survived and came to Starokonstantinov after the war. Sophia was a beautiful tall and stately woman. Germans came to her house hit her and pulled her by her hair across the whole town. Then they beat her to death. She died a death of martyr.

At night a terrible explosion shook our house. Germans dropped a bomb on onto the oil terminal. On the next day refugees from Lvov came to the town. They told people about the horrors of fascist occupation. But older Jews in Starokonstantinov didn't believe it. They knew Germans from WWI and were telling us that they were nice people and had nothing against Jews. We stayed home until 2 July 1941. Early in the morning of 2 July Fira's friend knocked on our window. He told us that people were evacuating from the station in Starokonstantinov. I ran to my aunt Surah-Rivah to tell her to get packed. We packed a small suitcase with a change of underwear and few sandwiches. My mother took wedding rings and 120 rubles - this was all money that we had. This money was stolen on the train later. We didn't take any clothes. We were overdosed with propaganda and thought that we would be back in 2-3 days or a week at the most. My father didn't go with us. He was sent to take some cattle to Kharkov region. I went with my mother and sister, aunt Surah-Riva, her older daughter Clara and Clara's children. Her older daughter Tzylia was 10, Bella was 6 and Leonid was 3 months old. Surah-Riva's husband refused to go. He thought he was too old and there was nothing for him to be afraid of. My aunt Surah-Riva joined us, but on the way she said that she had left her passport and went back to pick it up. This was the last time we saw her. Her passport was an excuse for her to go back to Aron, her husband.

We boarded open platforms and took on our way without clothes, food or diapers for Leonid. The train stopped in Gorky on 6 November 1941 when Germans were bombing Moscow. Stalin was speaking on the radio "Germans made a mistake...", when few German bombers were bombing Gorky. I was listening to Stalin's speech when people around me were running to a shelter. I couldn't move when listening to Stalin. You can imagine how strong the propaganda was. I didn't associate arrests in 1936 - 1937 with Stalin. I was sure that Stalin was unaware of the injustice in the country. He was sacred for me. Our train stopped at a station and there was another train with freight railcars. Clara went to that train, but there was no place for us. Clara was in evacuation in Gorky region and we moved on. We were heading the Ural. Our trip lasted two weeks. We were given food twice on our way: once we got ground radish in Slaviansk and then we got rabbit meat



in Ufa. When we were eating radish in Slaviansk somebody said that the train was leaving. People ran to the train and I stayed. I couldn't tear myself from this radish that tasted so delicious. I was pulled on the platform when the train started - I was so weak that I couldn't get there myself. I was dragged onto the platform when the train had started moving. There was no water on the train. When it stopped my mother got off to bring some water from a puddle. The train stopped few times a day. Such stops lasted few hours while letting trains heading the front pass. Sometimes we moved without any stops for days in a row and got very cold, especially at night. The train was overcrowded - there were people of various nationalities that had to leave their homes. We arrived in Cheliabinsk in 2500 km from Kiev. We got some hot tea at the railway station that revived us. We got accommodation in a small house of a poor family. There were 3 families - 12 people - in one room. They were all from Starokonstantinov. The family gave us some hay, we put it on the floor and slept on it. But we didn't stay in Cheliabinsk long.

When my father took cattle to Kharkov he was wounded with a splinter. He was taken to a hospital in Gorky. The wound wasn't severe, but my father had been starving and the wound didn't heal. Besides, my father had ulcer. The son of my father's brother Yukl, Joseph, his wife and two children lived in Gorky. Joseph was a professional military and was at the front, but his wife took my father to her home and called us to come to Gorky, in 1000 km from Cheliabinsk. Father sent us official invitation that helped us to move without delay. We came to her apartment. My sister went to the Medical institute in Gorky and I went to school. There were about 50 pupils in our class, most of them children that were in evacuation. I went to school for about two weeks, but then I had to stay at home. My father was ill and my mother took a job, selling kerosene. I had to do all housework. I fetched water from a pump where I had to stand in long lines. I went to fetch water with Abram, Joseph's son. He was 10 and I was 14 years old. Then we went to stand in line to get bread. People wrote their number in line on their palms, because there were 5-6 thousand people. We spent there all day long.

Firagraduated from the Medical Institute in December 1941 and was sent to Troitsk in the Ural, 500 km farther to the East. My mother went with her. My father was too weak to go. I stayed with him. In Troitsk Fira began to work at the children's home in 8 km from the town and my mother got a job of a teacher at this same children's home. They lived in a small room in the children's home. I was a patriot. This was how we were raised at school. We heard only communist propaganda on the radio and at meetings: there were songs, poems and speeches propagating devotion to the communist ideas. Everything we read in newspapers was about patriotism. I felt depressed that nobody in our family was at the front. I went to the military office to volunteer to the front. I was full of enthusiasm and didn't think about my parents at that moment. There was an older man at the reception. He asked me how old I was. I added one year and said that I was 16. He looked at me and told me to go home to grow a little older and added that he hoped that I wouldn't have to go to the front.

When my father got better we went to Troitsk. In Troitsk I went to work as a nurse at the children's home. We got a plot of land there and grew potatoes. My mother grew up in a village and was good at gardening. We went to the wood to pick up wild strawberries and sorrel. We received coupons for flour and my mother made pies stuffed with sorrel, wild strawberries and beetroot. They seemed delicious to us. The Chairman of Starokonstantinov town council was in evacuation in Verkhneuralsk, Cheliabinsk region. She was my parents' friend and her husband was director of

leather storage in Verkhneuralsk. He knew my father and offered him a job. My father went alone. My sister was sent to work - she got a job assignment in Kholmogory Arkhangelsk region and my mother and I moved to my father. We got accommodation with very nice people. People in Verkhneuralsk didn't know anything about Jews. They heard the word, but they believed that Jews were monsters with horns. When their children didn't behave themselves their parents scared them "A Jew will kidnap you". My mother told our landlady that we were Jews and she was surprised "Really? But you look like we do". She treated us nicely and allowed us to grow vegetables in her kitchen garden. It was very kind of her, because land was very precious in this area. We planted cucumbers and tomatoes. Cucumbers grew all right, but tomatoes didn't have enough time to get ripe. Summer lasted about two months. We put tomatoes in winter boots to get them ripe. The summer was hot and short: it lasted 1.50-2 months. Summer ended abruptly and it began cold suddenly. Frosts came at the beginning of September lasting to the middle of May the temperature dropped to minus fifty.

We were starving. We had planted potatoes, but it got rotten. We picked it and boiled. It smelled and tasted terrible. We received bread every now and then, and sometimes we were given dough instead of bread. My mother baked flat bread on the stove. We stoked the stove with pressed dung. I received 30 grams of bread at school. It was a small cube, as small as a postage stamp. Later we bought a small piece of frozen milk at the market. Once a local hunter gave us the insides of a partridge. It was a feast that I remembered!

I went to the 9th form at school. I didn't have one textbook or notebook. I borrowed textbooks from my classmates during intervals. I went to offices asking them for waste paper. I wrote on the backside of this paper. I had excellent marks in all subjects at school. Only in the tenth form I had a good mark in military science. I couldn't crawl, because I had one pair of socks and I refused to crawl. The teacher put me a lower mark.

In the 9th form I became a member of the Komsomol League. I had dreamed about it since I was at school in Starokonstantinov. My father didn't approve of my wish to become a Komsomol member. He was afraid that I would be recruited to the front at the Komsomol call. He didn't know that I had been to the military recruitment office once in Gorky. I was given a task to be the leader of a pioneer unit from the 3rd form. I helped them to do their homework and played with them at their free time.

There were local children and children that were in evacuation. The father of one of my classmates - Valia Kleniaeva was chief warden of a prison for political prisoners in Verkhneuralsk. It was a horrific prison where inmates were tortured. There was a basement with a descent of metal sheet with studs on it. Prisoners were thrown onto this descent and if they survived this torture they were left to die from wounds. Even fascists wouldn't have done this to their enemies. In everyday life Valia's father was a nice man and a devoted father at home... Valia and I were sharing a desk in our class.

At weekends my classmates and I were on duty in hospital. It was not a Komsomol duty. We were not forced to go there, but we felt that we were needed and wanted to help people that struggled for our Motherland at the front. We believed it was our contribution to the victory over fascism. We wrote letters for severely wounded patients, sang songs and recited poems. We also gave them water and food and they were grateful for our help.

After finishing school I entered the Medical Institute that was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk. I was fond of chemistry at school, but I couldn't find an Institute where I could study it.

My sister lived in Kholmogory in Arkhangelsk region in the north of Russia in 1500km to the north of Moscow. She was a pretty girl and had many local admirers. My sister was a doctor in the local hospital. She met her future husband there. He was a patient of the hospital. He was Russian. His name was Cyril Shyrovkov. He was a nice man. He fell in love with my sister. She didn't want to marry him, but she decided that marriage would protect her from annoying passes of local men. My father was indignant when he heard the news. Her marrying a man of different faith was a disgrace in his opinion. My father demanded that my sister divorced her husband and came home. But my sister couldn't quit her job. She was liable for military service and had to stay where she was assigned. My sister came home after the war. She was pregnant. Return to Starokonstantinov prior to divorcing her Russian husband was out of the question. The family couldn't go back home in such disgrace. Just to think about appearing in sight of the rabbi and neighbors was impossible.

End of the war was a big holidays for the people. There was much joy in the streets with everybody kissing and hugging. We looked forward to going home in our warm Ukraine. In 1945 our parents decided to go to Nikopol where my mother's older brother Moshe and his family lived. We didn't know what happened to our house or where we would find accommodation. My parents were hoping that my sister would divorce her Russian husband and we would be able to come back to Starokonstantinov. My mother was looking forward to seeing her brother who she hadn't seen for almost 20 years. But Moshe had been shot in his truck before we arrived. It happened in 1945 after the war, so his murderer might have been an anti-Semite or something.

We were staying with Moshe's family. My sister arrived later with her husband Cyril Shyrovkov and their one-year-old son Boris. She was pregnant again. It was a blow for my father. He was hoping that my sister would divorce her husband, but the situation changed with her second pregnancy. My sister gave birth to a girl. Her husband gradually became a member of our family. Even my father took to liking him in the course of time. My father wasn't working and Cyril couldn't find a job. We were selling dough shawls at the market. We purchased them from wholesalers. Moshe's widow and her daughter supported us, but they were also poor. My father decided that he and I would go to Starokonstantinov the rest of the family would join us later. My father was homesick and we had to prepare the house for my mother and my sister with her baby. We arrived in autumn 1946. There were two other families living in our apartment, but they gave us one room.

In few months my sister and her husband moved to Astrakhan because people said it was easier to find a job there and my mother came home to us. My sister's husband found a job, they received a room in the hostel and lived there until 1949. My father was severely ill and needed to be looked after. My mother couldn't work and we didn't have money to live. So, I went to work at a bank. I was an apprentice there for a week and then I began to work as an accountant. I worked there a year and then I met my future husband.

Yuri Milrud was born in Ostropol village not far from Starokonstantinov in 1921. His Jewish name was Usher. His father Abram Milrud was a good blacksmith and his mother Ida Milrud was a housewife. Yuri had two younger brothers. His family was religious and they celebrated all holidays and observed traditions. Yuri finished school and entered Leningrad aviation institute in 1939. He studied two months before their group was sent to the aviation school in Kachinsk. After he finished

this school the war began. He was sent to the tank school in Gorky and from there - to the Karelian and then - to Byelorussian front. He came as far as Berlin during the war. He was shell-shocked and had many military awards.

His parents and brothers stayed in Ostropol during the war. His father worked for Germans, but when Germans were retreating from Ostropol they shot the whole family. From Berlin Yuri was sent to work in Chernovtsy. He came to see his relatives in Starokonstantinov. We met and he proposed to me in three days. I gave my consent. My father was against my marriage. He thought that there was no man worthy of me. We had a civil wedding ceremony in Starokonstantinov and moved to Chernovtsy in 1947. I didn't change my last name to my husband's. I knew how unhappy my father was that he didn't have a son to keep the name of the family. His son died in infantry and my sister and I kept our family name after we got married.

There were many Jews in Chernovtsy and people spoke Yiddish everywhere. There was a kosher butcher's store name: "Kosher" not far from our home. There was a Jewish theater in the town, a Jewish school and a synagogue. The general atmosphere of tolerance and benevolence was very pleasant. I felt at home in this town. My husband and I had poor Yiddish and so we spoke Russian. My husband received two rooms in a 4-room apartment. He entered the Faculty of History at the University and graduated from it in a year and a half passing all exams externally. Upon graduation my husband worked as a teacher at a school for boys in Chernovtsy. He was a communist and was soon appointed director of the school.

I was admitted to the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy, but I was pregnant already. I withdrew my documents from the Medical Institute and entered the Physics and Mathematic Faculty of Pedagogical Institute to study there by correspondence. I went to Starokonstantinov to have my baby born where my mother was. Our first baby was born in Starokonstantinov on 29 January 1948. He was named Alexei. When he was three months old we returned to Chernovtsy. I studied at the Institute by for a year and went to the Philology Faculty at the University on the 2nd year. I could get a better education at the University. I didn't have to attend lectures. Studying by correspondence was more convenient. I took exams twice a year and spent the rest of the time with my son. On 29 December 1950 our second son Sergey was born.

In 1948 the cosmopolite trials began (9). The Jewish school and theater in Chernovtsy were closed. Many Jewish teachers and scientists were fired. I was staying at home looking after my children, but I read articles about what was going on in magazines and newspapers. It was fearful. I didn't know what to believe. My husband wasn't an active member of the party. He entered the party at the front, but he didn't participate in any public activities.

In 1949 my sister, her husband and son moved to Starokonstantinov. Their little daughter died from an epidemic in Astrakhan. My sister received an apartment and my father convinced the family living in our house to move to her apartment so that she could be living close to her parents. After the war our house was repaired. Gas and water piping and boiler were installed. My father got a closer acquaintance with my sister's husband Cyril. Cyril was a devoted husband and a nice man. He treated my parents with great respect. At the beginning my father talked to him unpleasantly distressed about his daughter marrying a non-Jewish man. But Cyril took it easy and did not argue with my father. Gradually my father changed his attitude. Cyril became director of a department store. He was a respectable man in Starokonstantinov. The Jews of the town used to say that a non-

Jewish man like him was worth of ten Jewish men. In 1950 their daughter Lialia was born. She was a lovely girl. My sister went to work as children's doctor at the children's hospital. She was a very good doctor and soon was promoted to head of department.

In 1953 during the period of the "doctors' case" (10) my sister was very concerned about the situation. She was even thinking of quitting her job before she was fired, but things turned out all right. She was a good doctor and people trusted her.

My father stopped being skeptical about the Jewish religion and traditions after the war. My parents celebrated Shabbat and Jewish holidays at home. Cyril also participated in celebrations. He was the one to ask questions during Seder at Pesach. At Pesach we had matzah at home. In the first year after the war when I still lived with my parents we made matzah at home. We had a wheel to make holes in the dough. In few years matzah began to be baked in Krasilov and my mother's acquaintances sent us matzah from there. My mother sent me some matzah to Chernovtsy. We couldn't get together to celebrate holidays - those were working days and we had to go to work.

My father died in 1960. My mother died in 1982. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Starokonstantinov. Last years my mother lived alone in our old house helping my sister to look after her children and do work about the house.

My sister Fira and her husband lived in Starokonstantinov. My sister's family also was there to help my mother. Their son graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic Institute. He got a job assignment in Dnepropetrovsk. He still works at a research institute there. Their daughter Lialia graduated from Medical Institute in Leningrad and works at a clinic there. Her husband is a surgeon. My sister's husband had a stroke in 2001. Cyril died on 4 November 2001. Lialia was staying with her parents while her father was ill. After his funeral she stayed with her mother for two months. My sister was reluctant to leave Starokonstantinov, but she couldn't live alone. She moved to her son Boris in Dnepropetrovsk. Boris and his wife Katia take good care of her.

In March 1953 Stalin died. I couldn't stop crying. People wore black armbands and there were meeting all over the town. The grief was overwhelming, but gradually it reduced leading to deeper understanding of the situation even before the XXth Party Congress(11) revealed the truth. After the Congress many people saw the true state of things. But it was also true that even those who were executed at Stalin's order were dying with the words "Long live Stalin!". They strongly believed that he was unaware of what was happening in the country.

I graduated from the University in 1956. My husband got a job assignment in a district school near Chernovtsy. He was director of a district school in Kiselyov for two years and then in Berezhtsy. I worked as a teacher of literature in the same schools. Later we returned to Chernovtsy. I couldn't find a job. It didn't have anything to do with my nationality. There were no vacancies for me. I was offered a temporary job at a kindergarten and I decided to accept it. I got a job at the kindergarten near my house. I liked my new job very much and children and their parents liked me. I worked at the kindergarten until I retired.

My husband and I celebrated all Jewish holidays, even though I grew up an atheist. School propaganda had its impact on my outlooks. However, my mother inspired love of Jewish traditions in me and I understand that it is my identity. My husband never cared about traditions, though. I



don't think he grew up in a religious family. The environment where a person grows is very important, I think. My husband didn't mind my observing Jewish traditions. I fasted at Yom Kippur and we celebrated Pesach at home. Of course, we didn't follow all rules. I didn't have special utensils for Pesach and we had bread at home. But on the first 2 or 3 days we only had matzah. After my mother died I began to buy matzah at the local synagogue. We also celebrated Soviet holidays. We had good friends - a Jewish family and always enjoyed having a good time with them. We got together on holidays to sing and dance and play games. We also celebrated New Year with them. We went skiing and had lots of fun.

My mother helped me to look after my sons when I went to work. She came to stay with us for several months in a row. I sent my sons to my mother to spend their summer vacation. They were nice kids. They were growing independent and kind.

After finishing school my older son Alexei finished a Construction College. He got married and in 1974 his son Alexandr was born. Alexei had to provide for his family and he went to work. I wish he had completed his education. He works as a foreman at the students' camp of the University. He has a good wife. She came from an assimilated Jewish family from Chernigov region near Kiev. Her family came to Chernovtsy after the Great Patriotic War. They did not observe any traditions and my son's family does not observe any traditions, either. They didn't know the language.

My younger son graduated from the Technological Faculty of Kiev Institute of Light Industry. Upon graduation he returned to Chernovtsy and began to work as engineer at the factory manufacturing kitchen utensils. Later he finished the law faculty of College of Commerce in Chernovtsy. He got a job of a lawyer at the butter and margarine factory. He was promoted to Head of Law department in no time. He got married and had two children: his daughter Julia was born in 1979 and his son Roman was born in 1989. My sons have Jewish wives. It is very important for me.

When Jews began to move to Israel my husband and I were not planning to move there. My husband and I grew up during the Soviet power and we believed we were not prepared to live in a capitalist society. Our children didn't want to move there, either. They had their families and friends here and were having a good life. But we sympathized with those who were leaving. I believed it was so bad that these people were called traitors of their Motherland. I was feeling hurt. My husband and I and our children wished peace and wealth to these people in their new home country and hoped they would never come to regret that they have left. We were very glad that Jews had Israel - it is very important for all Jewish people. We have never been there, but we heard many nice things about the country from the people that visited it. We wish peace and good life to this country.

On 19 October 1995 our younger son died of infarction. He called me to ask me how I was feeling. In about an hour his wife called and told us that Sergey wasn't feeling well. He died before we came to them. We buried him at the Jewish corner of the town cemetery in Chernovtsy. Sergey's wife and children moved to Israel in 1997. They live in Tel-Aviv. My daughter-in-law is a housewife. She studies the language. They call me on Jewish holidays and want me to visit them, but it is expensive for me to go. If my grandchildren send me a ticket once I would be happy to go visit them and see the country.

My older grandson Alexandr, Alexei's son, lives in Chernovtsy. He graduated from the Faculty of mathematics at University and worked as a teacher of mathematics at the Jewish school for two



years. He didn't like the system of education and he quit. He graduated from Business Faculty of the University and worked as economist at the town executive committee for some time. Now he works at a computer company. My grandson married a Ukrainian girl. She is very nice and we had no objections to their marriage.

On 12 January 1997 my husband went to a library. I was trying to convince him to stay at home – there was ice on the roads, but he left. Yuri slipped and fell injuring his knee and head. The doctors said he would be all right, but in two days he had a splitting headache. In the evening of 13 January his headache reduced and we went to bed. He died in the morning. Contusion of his head caused cerebral hemorrhage. My husband Yuri Milrud died on 14 January 2001. I buried him beside my son and in accordance with Jewish tradition. I live alone. My son calls me every day and visits me. I also have friends and made new friends at Hesed.

In the recent ten years many things have changed in the Jewish life here. I go to Hesed every Monday. We have a gathering of elderly Jews at 11 o'clock. On Wednesday I attend a literature studio. I also attend a vocal studio. We sing songs in Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian. I like singing and I feel happy when I sing. Singing inspires me and makes me forget my sorrows and problems. My husband and I used to sing Jewish and Soviet songs. We get Jewish songs typed in Russian font to be able to read. Now, when I sing, he seems to be near me. We feel like a family in Hesed. We celebrate birthdays, Shabbat and Jewish holidays. I am glad this time has come.

1. In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.
2. Was such much known ataman, he's surnames Zeleniy, (this in Russian translation means green), his gang concerned with a robbery and banditry.
3. White - a criminal shaping, which fought for conservation of tsarist mode in Russia.
4. Petliura Simon(1879-1926) , Ukrainian politician. Member Ukrainian social-democratic working party; In soviet-polish war has emerged on the side of Poland; in 1920 emigrated. Kill In Paris from the revenge for Jewish pogroms on the Ukraine.
5. In those years it was not safe to go to the synagogue. Those were the horrific 1930s – the period of struggle against religion. There was only one synagogue left of the 300 existing in Kiev before the revolution of 1917. Cult structures were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind the KGB (State Security Committee) walls.
6. In 1920 an artificial famine was introduced in Ukraine that caused the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress the protesting peasants that did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful forced famine in 1930-1934 in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the farmers. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that did not want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.
7. In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.
8. MOLOTOV (Skriabin) Viacheslav Mikhailovich (1890-1986) , a Soviet political leader During the October revolution he was a member of the Military Revolutionary Committee. He was belonged to the closest political surrounding of I.V. Stalin; one of the most active organizers of repression in the

1930s - early 1950s. He spoke against criticism of the cult of Stalin in mid 1950s.

9. Anti-Semitic campaign initiated by J. Stalin against intellectuals: teachers, doctors and scientists.

10. «Doctors' Case» - The so-called Doctors' Case was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with the murder of outstanding Bolsheviks. The "Case" was started in 1952, but was never finished because Stalin died in 1953.

11. 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what was happening in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.