

# Leonid Rozenfeld

Leonid Rozenfeld

Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: June 2003

Leonid Rozenfeld lives in a nice two-bedroom apartment in a house built in the 1980s in the elite Pechersk district of Kiev. There is nice furniture, crockery and carpets in the apartment. The Rozenfelds bought these things when they were still working. Leonid makes the impression of a nervous person. One can hardly call him a sociable and easy-going man. He is a bit grumpy and repetitious. Every now and then he goes to the kitchen to ask his wife's advice about something in his story that arises his doubt. His wife is a very reserved and calm woman. One can tell that she is the head of the family.

My parents' families came from Boguslav, a small town in Kiev region, 120 kilometers from Kiev. This town, located on the picturesque banks of the Ros' River, is very beautiful. The Ros' River flows between the steep rocky banks. The town is especially beautiful in spring when it buries itself in the verdure of blooming white and pink gardens. The population of Boguslav in the early 19th century was about 10,000 people, the majority of whom were Jews. Jews lived in the central part of the town; they were mostly involved in crafts and commerce. There were shoemakers, tailors, joiners, carpenters, glasscutters, clock repairers and bakers. Ukrainians were farmers living in the suburbs and neighboring villages. Two or three times a week there was a market in the central square of Boguslav where farmers brought their products. The biggest market was on Sunday. Farmers sold poultry, dairy products, vegetables and potatoes. There were shops owned by local Jewish craftsmen who sold household goods, tools and haberdashery. There was a Christian church in the central square; this church is still there. The synagogue was closed in the middle of the 1920s during the struggle against religion [1](#). It became a normal house.

My mother's parents died long before I was born. My mother told me little about them. All I know is that my grandfather's name was Asriel Ozerianski and my grandmother's was Gita Ozerianskaya. I don't know her maiden name. They were born in Boguslav in the 1860s. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living, but they must have been wealthy since they provided education for all their numerous children. My grandfather and grandmother observed Jewish traditions. I have a photo from a visit to their relatives in Kiev on which they are dressed according to the Jewish requirements. My grandfather had a beard and wore a cap that was a little bigger than a kippah and my grandmother had a kerchief. I'm sure they were religious Jews and observed Jewish holidays. Anyway, that's only my best guess since my mother didn't like talking about her family. My grandparents died shortly before the [Russian] Revolution of 1917 [2](#). They had many children, but I knew only three of them. The rest either died before I was born or moved abroad. I have a dim memory of Uncle Meishe Ozerianski, my mother's older brother who visited us occasionally. I know that he was married, but I don't know how he earned his living. My uncle died long before the Great Patriotic War [3](#).

We were very close with Aunt Etl Kozlova, nee Ozerianskaya, and Uncle Nuchim Ozerianski, my mother's younger brother who was called Hema in the family. Etl was older than my mother. She was born around 1890, finished a grammar school in Boguslav and got married. In the middle of the 1930s Aunt Etl, her husband and two sons, Yenia and Michael, moved to Kiev to be closer to us. During the Great Patriotic War, Yenia was at the front in Russia and Ukraine, and became a lecturer at the Irkutsk Military College after the war. After demobilization from the army he settled down in Kramatorsk with his wife. Michael stayed in Cheliabinsk where he lived the rest of his life. After the war Aunt Etl and her husband moved to Kherson. Aunt Etl wasn't religious, but in her family they observed all Jewish holidays paying tribute to traditions. Etl died in the early 1950s. Her sons died a long time ago, too.

Uncle Nuchim Ozerianski, born in 1900, lived in Boguslav and worked in commerce. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War he bought a house for his savings where he lived with his wife and two daughters, Gita and Manya. Gita was born in 1921 and was named after her grandmother and Manya was born in 1924. She was the same age as I. Nuchim's family wasn't religious. I liked to visit Uncle Nuchim and his daughters were my friends. We went to the cinema and discotheque together.

My mother Dora Ozerianskaya was born in 1893. The Jewish name she received at birth was Genia-Dvoira. My mother studied with teachers at home and then finished a grammar school in Boguslav. She studied well. She also learned to play the piano. I have no information about my mother's life before she met my father. All I know is that after she finished grammar school her parents sent her to Kiev where she studied at a private dentistry school and after finishing it she received a dentist license. Shortly after she returned to Boguslav, Grandfather Asriel and Grandmother Gita passed away. Then the Revolution took place in 1917 which led to the Civil War [4](#) causing all horrors associated with this period: gangs [5](#) and pogroms [6](#) from which Jews had to hide in basements and attics. My mother met my father then. He was chief of the Jewish self-defense movement [7](#).

My paternal grandfather Michel Rozenfeld, born in 1852, owned a store in Boguslav. I don't know what he was selling, but it was a big store. He had a few employees. My grandfather had a house of his own. Once, when we were going for a walk in the town, my parents showed this house to me. I know that my grandfather went to cheder. I don't know whether he continued his education. He was an intelligent man. He read and recited verses well and did his own accounting in the store. He had a solid Jewish education. I remember that he had many Jewish books. He could read in Hebrew. He read the Torah and the Talmud. Before the Revolution of 1917 my grandfather was very religious. He wore a kippah and a big thick beard. In his family they observed all Jewish traditions, followed the kashrut, celebrated Sabbath and the Jewish holidays. My grandfather didn't work on Saturday.

After the Revolution my grandfather must have been under the influence of my father, who was his oldest son. My grandfather shaved his beard and only wore a moustache for some time. Later he grew a small beard. He wore a kippah at home and when he went to the synagogue. He sort of concealed his religiosity from the surrounding people. At home he continued to observe all traditions and holidays. My grandfather didn't work after the Revolution. I guess the Soviet power expropriated his store and house, at least I know that he didn't have a house after the Revolution. My grandfather and grandmother lived in a small room in the synagogue. In 1927 the synagogue was closed. My grandparents and our family settled down on the second floor of the former

synagogue.

Grandmother Menie, born in the 1860s, was younger than my grandfather. I don't remember her maiden name. She was a housewife. I don't know how many brothers or sisters my grandfather and grandmother had. My father told me that during pogroms during the Civil War his two uncles and his aunt and her children perished, but I don't know whether they were my grandfather or my grandmother's brothers and sister. I knew my father's brothers and sister. My father had five brothers: Shymon, Alexandr, Yankel, David and Michael. His sister's name was Ania. The boys studied in cheder and were raised religiously, but they got under the influence of revolutionary ideas and became atheists.

Shymon Rozenfeld was born around 1893. After the Revolution he worked in commerce and in the middle of the 1930s he moved to Kiev with his family. My father helped him to get a job as the director of the canteen at the vocational school where my father worked. When the Great Patriotic War began Shymon joined the Territorial army [see fighting battalion] [8](#). He perished either during the defense of Kiev or in the city occupied by Germans. His wife Vera and daughter Ania evacuated to Astrakhan where they lived throughout the war. Ania lives in Kiev now. She is the only one of my cousins still alive.

The next child was Alexandr Rozenfeld, born in 1895/6. We called him Uncle Sasha. I don't know his Jewish name. He finished financial college in Rostov and worked there as chief of the financial department. Alexandr was arrested in 1938 and perished in Stalin's prisons [during the Great Terror] [9](#). In the middle of the 1950s his wife Tamara received documents about the posthumous rehabilitation [10](#) of her husband.

My uncle Yankel Rozenfeld, born in 1898, was closest to me. He finished a Jewish elementary school and this was all the education he got. He worked at a store during the Soviet regime. He lived in Boguslav with his wife Sarra and two children: Rachil - we called her Chilia - and Naum, whom we called Nyuma. Rachil died of a heart disease at the age of 16. Naum and I were friends and I often visited them in Boguslav.

Uncle David Rozenfeld was born around 1900. He received a higher education and lived his life in Moscow. He held high official posts. At the end of his career he was the capital construction manager at the Ministry of Transport of the USSR. David died in 1970. He had three children: Alla, Ania and Mark. Alla died recently and Ania and Mark live in Moscow with their families.

The youngest brother Michael Rozenfeld was born around 1903. I don't know where exactly he studied. He lived and worked in Rostov. He was the art director and producer of Rostov Drama Theater and in his last years became its director. Michael was a very sociable man. I met him on my way home from Middle Asia after demobilization in 1945. I stayed with him in Rostov for a few days. Uncle Michael died in 1961. His daughter Sophia, who was the director of a kindergarten in Rostov for many years, emigrated to the US with her daughter in the 1970s and we lost contact with her.

My father's sister Ania was born in 1905. She had the last name of Sychevskaya in her marriage. Her husband left her and my father took her and her son Mitia to Kiev in the 1930s. Aunt Ania died shortly before the war. Her son Mitia was recruited to the army. He went to the front and returned to Kiev after the war, got married and had children. Mitia passed away in 1980.

My father was born in 1891; his Jewish name was Mordko. After the Revolution he changed his name to the more common name [11](#) of Mark. After finishing cheder my father studied in a Jewish elementary school and then finished a secondary school for boys [a so-called Realschule] [12](#). He was good at music, learned to play the violin and dreamed of becoming a musician. After finishing school my father went to Astrakhan, where the cousin of my grandmother's sister lived, and entered the Conservatory.

Then World War I began. My father was on vacation in Boguslav and from there he was recruited to the army. His unit stayed in Boguslav, then they went to the front and returned to Boguslav for training. My father was promoted to the rank of ensign in the tsarist army. My father had many friends among the young officers. When they were in the rear they had a good time knowing that soon they were to go to the front. My father also served in a military unit near Chernigov. He was an enlightened young man for his time. After the Revolution of 1917, when propaganda of revolutionary ideas began in the tsarist army, he joined the Red army. My father struggled against the gang of ataman Zeleniy [the so-called Greens] [13](#) and Denikin [14](#) troops in Kiev and was at the front.

In early 1919 my father was sent to Boguslav where the power switched from one unit to another. There were gangs and pogroms and the Jewish population was on the verge of extermination, hiding in cellars and basements. My father's uncles and aunt and their families perished. Many other citizens of the town fell victim to the pogrom makers. My father spoke at a gathering to the young Jewish people appealing to them to organize a self-defense unit to struggle against the bandits. There were about 600 people in their units. They had 250 rifles, two automatic guns, bombs and grenades. I have no idea where they managed to get these weapons. The unit raided nearby villages and towns fighting the bandits. Boguslav became a center of self-defense in Kanev district, Kiev region. The local population sympathized with them and supported them with food and accommodation. They struggled for three years. At the third anniversary of their fighting unit my father made an ardent speech expressing his appreciation of their bravery. In summer 1923 the fighting unit of Boguslav was dismissed since there were no bandits left in the country and the country and its people were starting peaceful reconstruction work.

My father was already married by that time. My parents got married in 1920. They didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding since my father was devoted to communist ideas and rejected any Jewish rules or traditions. After finishing secondary school, my father graduated from the Higher Party School [15](#) in Kiev in 1920. He became the director of the power plant in Boguslav, was elected deputy of the town council more than once and was a well-known person in the town.

My older brother Israel was born in 1921. He was called Izia in the family. I followed on 27th May 1924. I was called Lyolia in the family and I still like it when close people call me so. It reminds me of my childhood. My memories date back to when I was four years old. Our family lodged in two rooms, the two other rooms belonged to my paternal grandparents'. Uncle Shymon and Uncle Yankel's families lived on the first floor. I have dim memories of this period of my life. I remember that my father went to work early in the morning and returned home late in the evening when I was already asleep. My mother was a housewife. Grandfather Michel spent a lot of time with us. He read us fairy tales and told us biblical stories. He prayed in his room every day with his tallit and tefillin on his hand and head. He insisted on observing the Jewish holidays, even though our father was against them. My grandfather invited us to his part of the house.

I remember Chanukkah when all the children - I, Naum and Rachil - sat at the table wearing our fancy clothes. We were given sweets and money. Every evening my grandfather lit another candle on the special candle stand [the chanukkiyah]. There were potato pancakes and delicious doughnuts on the table. There must have been other holidays, but I don't remember them. In 1929 my grandfather fell ill with cancer. He got worse and worse. He died in spring 1930. He was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions: grandfather was lying on the floor wrapped in a shroud and women were crying over him with their clothes torn. Men recited memorial prayers. I didn't go to the funeral, but later I was told that grandfather was taken to the cemetery on a barrow and buried in a semi-recumbent position. My grandmother continued living with us helping my mother about the house and playing with us, her grandchildren.

In early 1931 my father got a job offer to the Arsenal plant in Kiev - a military tool manufacturing plant. My father received two rooms in a communal apartment [16](#) in a two-storied building in Ulianov Street in the center of Kiev. The building was painted pale yellow. One of the rooms was a 30 square meters and the other one was smaller, about 15 square meters. My brother and I had our beds and a desk in the smaller room and our parents lived in the bigger room where they had their nickel-plated beds, a big dinner table covered with a velvet tablecloth, a wardrobe and a beautifully carved cupboard. There was a common kitchen. Another family lived in this apartment. I don't remember them well, but I do remember that there were no conflicts. Each family had a table with a Primus stove on it in the kitchen. There was running water and a toilet in the kitchen. There was no bathroom and my father, my brother and I went to the nearby sauna.

In this same year, in 1931, I started school. My parents spoke Yiddish with each other and Russian with us. There was a Ukrainian school near our house and my brother and I went there. I didn't have any problems with my studies since back in Boguslav, Grandfather Michel had taught me to read in Russian and Ukrainian. On summer vacation my mother and I went to Boguslav. Usually we stayed at Uncle Yankel's during the holidays. I spent that summer with my cousin Nuchim. We became friends. In fall 1932 the famine [17](#) began. We didn't suffer as much as other people. Since my father worked at one of the biggest plants, he received food packages. He had meals in the canteen at the plant. Of course, there was a strict distribution of food in our family, but we didn't starve. A few times I saw people dying in the streets. They were swollen from hunger. In the morning a truck picked up the dead bodies to transport them to the cemetery.

By the summer of 1934 life improved a little, and in fall that year, after the harvest, food products were supplied to stores: there were cereals and bread deliveries. My father got another job. He became deputy director of a training school at the machine building plant. In 1939 this school was given the status of a vocational school. My mother worked at the medical unit of this school housed in a separate building. It was like an independent clinic. Soon my father helped other relatives to move to Kiev: Uncle Shymon became the director of the school canteen, as I've mentioned before. Aunt Ania and Mitia also moved to Kiev. Our relatives often visited us and we went to see them, too.

We celebrated 1st May, October Revolution Day [18](#) and birthdays. I liked visiting Aunt Ania. She lived in Krasnoarmeyskaya Street in the center of the city. There were parades moving along her street on holidays and we could watch them from her balcony. In the evening we watched fireworks. I cannot remember any family gatherings to celebrate Jewish holidays. My parents' friends were Jews in their majority; they often came to visit us. Most of my parents' colleagues

were Jews. My father got along well with Russians and Ukrainians, but he had no friends among them. My father's colleagues often came to celebrate holidays with us. They brought sausage, cheese, vegetables, fruit and lemonade and the women laid the table. They had fun and enjoyed these parties. I don't remember anybody getting drunk. My father loved music and sang beautifully. He was the life and soul of the parties. He sang Jewish and Ukrainian songs and Russian ballads. They also danced to music from our record player. Life was interesting and full of joy.

In the evening our father often took us to Proletarski Garden on the slopes of the Dnieper. There was an open-air stage called Zelyony [Green] Theater where a symphonic orchestra played every evening and on Sunday. Many Kievites remember those prewar evenings in the park with an orchestra playing. I liked theaters, too. My favorite was the opera. Time flew. My older brother went to study at a special artillery school after finishing secondary school. I became a pioneer at school. I was fond of photography. My father gave me a camera on my birthday and I became a photo correspondent for our school newspaper. Besides, I went in for sports: cycling, skiing and gymnastics. My prewar school years were bright and beautiful years of my youth.

In 1937-1938, during the period of arrests of numerous 'enemies of the people' [19](#), we couldn't understand where so many 'enemies' came from, but we believed everything that newspapers published and radio broadcast. We sincerely believed there were many enemies of communism and they had to be exterminated. My relatives didn't tell me that my uncle Alexandr was arrested and disappeared in Stalin's prisons. My parents never discussed these subjects with us. When I asked my father where all those enemies of the Soviet power came from, he kept silent.

We knew about fascism from newspapers and films. We knew that Hitler strained himself to seize power. We watched the film Professor Mamlock [20](#), which described Hitler's attitude towards Jews. We realized we were on the verge of war. Even though the Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact [21](#) was signed we couldn't help seeing that the country was preparing for war. There were military training sessions: test air raids or men gathering for military training terms. After finishing artillery school my brother Israel went to study at Kiev Artillery College from where he graduated in 1940. He got an assignment to serve in Western Ukraine. He served in Rovno and Lvov. He visited us for the last time in spring 1941.

In June 1941 I finished the 9th grade and was planning to spend my summer vacations in Boguslav. At 5am on 22nd June we heard the roar of planes and explosions. We ran outside and so did our neighbors. There were no planes in the sky and we returned home. The roar came from another part of Kiev and we decided this was some kind of military training. At 12 o'clock we heard Molotov's [22](#) speech on the radio. He announced that the war had begun. Germany was attacking our country. On the next day I ran to school. There was a hospital set up there. Beds were put into the classrooms and hallways and there were people in white gowns running to and fro with their faces expressing concern. All medical personnel was subject to military service and my mother was recruited by a subpoena from the military registry office on 25th June. On that same day she was sent to a front line hospital. My father was very busy preparing his school for evacuation. In early July 1941 he sent me to Boguslav. I stayed in Boguslav for about ten days.

In the middle of July teenage boys who were of under recruitment age were lined up at the order of the military registry office to march to Donetsk. The government needed recruits for the future. Naum and I said goodbye to our family and joined the others for the march. We walked about 200

kilometers, as far as Kryukovo near Poltava. There was an air raid and German troops landed nearby. Our commanding officers ordered us to spread in the area hoping that it would be easier for us to survive if we separated. We already had an understanding what a war was like. There were people killed or wounded around us.

Naum and I decided to move in the direction of Chuguyev where our aunt lived. We walked several days. Sometimes we got a ride on a horse-drawn cart or a truck. We also boarded a train. We came to Kharkov dirty and hungry with our clothes torn. On the first day there I saw a young man wearing the uniform of a student of a vocational school with the abbreviation 'IKRU', first Kiev vocational school, on his tab. This abbreviation stood for the school where my father worked. I stopped that boy and he told me that their vocational school along with my father had been evacuated to Kharkov. This boy took us to my father. We were so happy to see him.

Naum went to see his aunt in Chuguyev hoping to hear from her what had happened to his parents. On the next day my mother found us in the same way as I had found my father. Her hospital moved via Kharkov and she also saw a boy whose uniform indicated that he was a student of my father's school. On that same day the director of the hospital released my mother. She was almost 50 and he felt sorry for her. Kharkov military registry school sent my mother to Novosibirsk hospital behind the Ural. My mother and I left a few days later. We headed to Frunze where my mother's brother Nuchim was. We went on a passenger train. The trip was long since the train often stopped for a long while to let military trains pass.

We went to Novosibirsk and my father went to the town of Molotov [Penza at present] with his school. In Novosibirsk my mother got an assignment to the face injuries and stomatology hospital in Frunze. By late summer 1941 my mother and I arrived at Frunze [Kazakhstan], which was 3,000 kilometers from Kiev. We stayed with my mother's brother Nuchim who rented a room from a local family in Voroshylovka settlement in the suburb of Frunze. He was there with his wife Sarra and their daughters.

Frunze was a big town, but only in the center it had bigger multi-storied houses. There were small private pise-walled houses in Voroshylovka. Nuchim's family lived in a big room in one of those houses. There were no comforts in the house. There was a summer kitchen outside. My mother and I lodged in this room. My mother worked in the hospital and I went to the 10th grade at a local school, about three kilometers from where we lived in Lebedinka settlement. There were many other evacuated children at school. There were Jews among them. We got along well with the local children. I joined the Komsomol [23](#) in the 10th grade. We all wanted to become Komsomol members to be of use to our motherland. There was a ceremony in the conference room where we received our Komsomol membership cards.

In winter 1941 my father came from Molotov. His vocational school was dismissed. My father became the director of the garment factory evacuated from Kharkov. My mother spent days and nights in the hospital. She wanted to work as much as possible to distract herself from the big sorrow that fell upon us: in August 1941 my brother Israel disappeared. We received a notification about this in late December 1941. In spring 1942 I was recruited to the army. At that time my father received a two-bedroom apartment, but I didn't live one single day in it.

After two-month training in a military unit I was sent to the military infantry school in Frunze. I studied very well and was promoted to first sergeant. We were supposed to study six months, but a

month before graduation we were demobilized to the army. We were sent to the vicinity of Bryansk near Sukhinichi [Russia], 1,500 kilometers from Frunze. I remember our train stopped in a field. We got off the train and marched to our military unit. We were distributed to various units. I was sent to rifle regiment 407 of the Central Front [it was later renamed Bryanski and then 1st Belarusian Front].

I became first sergeant in a rifle company. We were ambushed in our first battle. Our unit moved to the area where no German troops were left when all of a sudden we got under fire of German troopers hiding in the woods. My comrade cadet Sasha Andronnikov was wounded in his throat. He shouted something and died in my arms. Many of our military men were wounded or killed. We began to fire back and the fascists retreated. This first battle is still vivid in my memory. There were many more that were also terrible, but this one was the most horrific.

I wasn't a coward and was always among the first attackers. We drank one hundred milliliters of vodka before action on a battlefield and called it a 'frontline shot'. It inspired a feeling of courage. I must say here that bullets or bombs hit those that gave in to their fear. Sometime I was appointed commanding officer of a machine gun platoon and then I received the rank of junior lieutenant.

In late June 1943 we were moved to the vicinity of Orel [Russia] where our units were in defense in-depth near Kursk. Our commandment knew that the fascists were preparing for a massive attack and gathered the best units in this area. There were four defense lines. Our unit was in the second defense line. On 5th July operation 'Citadel' began. It is known as the Kursk battle [24](#). I participated in this battle. Fascists bombed our positions for several days. It was a non-stop bombing. They broke through our first defense line, but then our second line rose. My rifle unit was there, too. The Germans had their tanks moving ahead of the infantry, but we cut them off with aimed fire. We had lots of casualties, but we went into attack. This battle was a turning point in the Great Patriotic War. After this battle our army went into attack along the whole front line.

I wrote to my parents and Uncle David in Moscow every day. I knew how sad my mother's condition was after Israel perished. My uncle David received letters sooner than my parents did. Sometimes he resent my letters to my parents in Frunze. My parents wrote that Grandmother Menie, who was in evacuation with her cousin in Astrakhan, had died. I also knew that my uncle Yankel, my father's brother, his wife and their son Naum were evacuated to Frunze. My father helped them to find a job and lodging. My mother described their life in evacuation. I didn't write her that I took part in military action just for the sake of her peace of mind.

In September 1943 I joined the Communist Party. At the frontline the candidateship term was reduced to three months. I obtained recommendations from the commanding officer of our company and the political chief. In November I was sent to a military school in the town of Shuya near Moscow. There was a group of young people with secondary education and knowledge of German. This school in Shuya trained specialists of propaganda in the army of the enemy, but when we arrived at Shuya it turned out this school had been disbanded. We were sent back.

During my absence a bomb had hit the earth house of my platoon. My comrades perished. I was overwhelmed with the feeling of guilt, although it wasn't my fault. Our division was liberating Belarus at that time. After we returned our group was called to the army headquarters where we took a course of training. We were taught slogans to agitate against the war to convince fascists to drop their weapons and yield into captivity. German captives were teaching us. There were a few



Jews in our group. They spoke Yiddish, which is close to German, and it was easier for them to learn and understand German. I still remember the slogans we shouted, 'Attention! Attention! German soldiers! Save your souls and go back to your families...! The Soviet troops crossed the Dnieper and liberated Dnepropetrovsk, Dneprodzerzhinsk, etc.' There was a ski battalion formed in our unit. I was good at skiing and was a member of this group. Other guys were mainly former partisans that were professional military. Before a battle we put on our camouflage cloaks. I sat in a trench on the very front shouting slogans in German. Then I went back to my unit to participate in action. I can't remember any fascists yielding into captivity in our area, but I think those slogans helped to break the morale spirit of our enemy.

In February 1944 after defense in depth we proceeded attacking. I was the commanding officer of a platoon in our ski battalion. We were ordered to settle down in Bykhov [Russia] double track station on 23rd February 1944, Soviet Army Day [25](#), where there were many trains with German military equipment. We proceeded into the rear of the enemy at night with our camouflage cloaks on. We covered almost 40 kilometers that night dragging our machine guns. We got stationed at the station without a single shot and began to wait for the rest of our units to join us. They were supposed to join us in the afternoon of 23rd February, but they weren't there on the 23, or the 24 or the following days.

The Germans in the end understood that there were actually only a few of us there. They started bombarding us from an armored train and bombers. What an ordeal that was! We suffered losses and there were hardly any of our troopers left. We kept the fascists back for ten days. On the tenth day other units arrived. When we got the order to retreat, a mine exploded at our commandment point. The commanding officer of the battalion was severely wounded and the deputy commander, major Zhys, a Jew, was killed. A splinter of a mine injured my jaw. I was taken to a field hospital where I stayed for two days. I needed surgery since my lower jaw was shattered, I lost all teeth, and, besides, I was slightly wounded in my stomach.

I was taken to hospitals in Bryansk and Penza where I had a surgery. After the surgery I was sent to a rear hospital in Novosibirsk and from there I went to the hospital in Frunze where my mother worked. She knew about my injury, but she didn't expect that I would come to Frunze. My mother wasn't at work when I arrived. I stayed there a few days until a medical nurse found my parents at my request. My father, mother, uncle Nuchim and Yankel's families came to the hospital immediately. They were so happy that I had survived and wasn't to go back to the front. I had complications - inflammation of marrow - and stayed in hospital for almost ten months.

After the war Yankel and his wife returned to Boguslav where Yankel continued to work in the trade business. He died in 1969. Naum went to Moscow where my father's younger brother David worked in the Ministry of Transport. Naum finished transport college and held official posts with the Moscow metro. Naum, as they said, 'was burning at work'. He died of an infarction in the early 1970s. He was single. After the war Nuchim's family returned to Boguslav. In 1947 they sold their house and moved to Kiev. Nuchim died in 1948. Gita and Manya died in the middle of the 1980s. They were single and lived their life together. They worked at a factory.

After Kiev was liberated in November 1944 my father tried to obtain permission for himself and my mother to return to Kiev for almost a year. He finally managed to obtain such a permission from the Ministry of Light Industry. After I recovered I was acknowledged to be fit for military service

with some limitations. I was sent to a military unit in the town of Termez in Middle Asia [today Uzbekistan] and later I was transferred to Krasnovodsk near Ashgabad [today Turkmenistan]. I was commanding officer of a training platoon of the mountain skiing rifle battalion. This was probably the happiest time in my life. Although an invalid, I survived and could enjoy the beauty of snow-topped mountains and I liked mountain skiing.

In July 1946 I was demobilized and sent to Kiev military regiment. My parents looked forward to my coming back. They failed to get back our apartment. Some other tenants lived there. According to the law war veterans could have their prewar dwelling returned to them. When I arrived we managed to move into a smaller room. A partial was installed in the bigger room. My parents and those other tenants shared this room.

My father was the director of a construction trust for several years. After he retired he went to work at the trade union committee of the motorcycle plant. In 1960 my father fell ill with cancer. He died in 1961. My mother continued working as a dentist for some time. In 1950 she retired and was a housewife. She died in 1975.

In 1946 I became a 3rd-year student at construction college. After finishing it I entered the All-Union Extramural Engineering Construction College. There was an affiliate in Kiev. I worked as a foreman at a construction site and attended classes after work.

I had friends at the Construction College. We got together to celebrate holidays: 1st May, October Revolution Day and New Year's. At the New Year's party in 1949 I met Maria Lenkova, a Jewish girl. I liked Maria very much. She was a student of the Faculty of Geography of Kiev State University. She was born in Boguslav in 1928. We went for walks, to the cinema and theater together. Proletarski Park was renamed Pervomayski, there were brass and symphonic orchestras playing in the park.

I met Maria's mother Esther. She was a simple Jewish woman. She spoke Yiddish, but she wasn't religious. Maria's father, whose name I don't remember, had passed away. Maria's older sister Inna married a Jewish man before the war. He was a tailor. His last name was Tabachnik. They didn't have any children. Inna finished Kiev Pedagogical College and worked as a biology teacher in a secondary school. During the Great Patriotic War they were in evacuation in the Ural. Maria and I got married two years after we met, in 1951, before Maria's graduation. We had a wedding party in a restaurant. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. There were many guests: our relatives and friends. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions.

I worked in construction and studied. My first construction was in Mechnikova Street where we built huge apartment houses for construction workers. Later I was involved in the construction of Kiev Prosthetic Plant. After finishing college I went to work at a Design Institute called Ukgiprotorg: it was responsible for the design and construction of trade agencies all over the country. I started my career as a technician there and was promoted to chief project engineer. I worked there for 50 years.

Upon graduation from university Maria got a [mandatory job] assignment [26](#) and went to work as a teacher of geography in a small village in Zhytomyr region. In a few months I made some arrangements to obtain a release for her and she came to Kiev. We lived in Maria's apartment in Saksaganskogo Street in the center of the city. Maria's mother and sister and her husband also

lived in this apartment. Maria couldn't find a job for a long time. This was the period of the campaign against cosmopolitans [27](#) when Jews couldn't get a job or keep their previous employment. We were lucky in our institute. Our director Vassili Lukianchenko, a Ukrainian man, was very positive about having Jewish employees. He didn't care about nationality, but valued performance and personality. Many Jews were promoted in our institute, but such attitude was rare in those years.

Maria didn't work for several years. In 1952 our daughter Rina was born. Maria went back to work in 1955, two years after Stalin died and when state anti-Semitism mitigated. We didn't think that Stalin was to blame for the many misfortunes of our people. When he died I took it as a personal loss. Millions of Soviet people asked themselves, 'How are we going to live without him?' However, life went on and after the revelatory speech of Khrushchev [28](#) at the Twentieth Party Congress [29](#), 'The cult of Stalin and its consequences', we believed in the triumph of truth and humanity.

Unfortunately my marriage failed. Maria worked as a secretary at school and then, when she became a class tutor, she spent too much time at work forgetting that she had a husband and a daughter at home. We weren't hungry, of course. My mother-in-law cooked and served dinners for us, but I didn't like this situation at all. I didn't like visiting friends and going to celebrations alone. Maria spent all holidays at school. I went to theaters and cinemas with my former fellow students. We also went on tours together. Only once my wife, my daughter and I went on vacation to the Crimea or Caucasus together.

I understood that I had to change my life and find a woman that would dedicate her life to me rather than her work, but I just adored my daughter and couldn't stand the thought of leaving her while she was small and needed me. I created all conditions for her to have a happy and carefree childhood, but Rina understood that I lived with her mother only for her sake. Even when we received a new apartment from my institute Maria didn't want to spend time making it a cozy home. I could get a plot of land for a dacha, but my wife said she didn't want it. On weekends my friends worked in their gardens and built small cozy huts. My daughter and I visited them, but my wife couldn't care less. She was only interested in spending time with her schoolchildren.

My daughter finished secondary school and a higher music college where she learned to play the violin. She married Alexandr Buriakovski, a nice Jewish man. They met at their friends' party. They began to live in our apartment. At that time I became friends with my colleague Natalia Berzler. Natalia was born to a Jewish family in Minsk in 1933. During the war she was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk. After the war she finished Kiev Polytechnic Institute and worked in our institute. I always liked her. She is sociable and cheerful. I left my wife for Natalia in 1974, when my daughter turned 22. In the same year Rina's daughter Ilona was born.

Natalia and I had a civil wedding ceremony. We've been together privately and professionally for almost 30 years. I'm very happy with her. My second wife got along well with Rina. Rina couldn't find a job as a music teacher in the first years after my granddaughter was born. I supported her with money until she got a job as a teacher in a kindergarten.

My daughter was under the influence of her husband who became very fond of the idea of emigrating to Israel. I refused to sign her permission to leave. I told her I wouldn't allow her to leave. It wasn't because I didn't like Israel or something. Although I was very happy that Jewish people had their own country, I believed that it wasn't for my daughter to leave. I was a product of

the Soviet epoch and Soviet time and couldn't imagine living in a different country. My daughter couldn't leave without my permission, even if she was married and had her own family. It was mandatory that she had my written permission validated by a notary stating that I released her from her duty to support me at my old age or in case of my illness. This was a legal requirement, but I wasn't giving it to her for almost a year.

She began writing anonymous letters to my workplace and letters of complaint to the party organizations. We became enemies with her. I could never imagine that my sweet girl, whom I loved dearly, could shout abusive words into my face hurting my wife and me. My director called me to his office. Our human resource manager and the secretary of our party organization were in his office. They convinced me to sign this permission of leave for her. Rina and Maria left in 1980. I was invited to the district party committee and reprimanded for letting my daughter emigrate. In their eyes she was a traitor and an alien element. However, I remained a party member since they were aware that I was against my daughter's departure. Frankly speaking I didn't care about my party membership. I've never been an active communist. I just paid my monthly membership fee regularly and got bored at the meetings.

Rina went to live in America in the late 1970s. She lives in Philadelphia. We parted as enemies, but later we began writing letters to one another as if nothing had happened between us. In 1990 I visited my daughter in Philadelphia. She has a good life. She works as a programmer. Ilona finished college and has a job. Rina left her husband and doesn't want to remarry. I often think about how wrong I was when I didn't allow Rina to leave. I don't think she has fully forgiven me.

Recently I've become involved in public activities: I'm the chairman of the association of veterans of the war at the Ukrainian Jewish Council, an active member of the Association of Jewish Culture and deputy chairman of the International Ukrainian Union of War Veterans. We take care of patriotic education of young people and arrange meetings with Jewish veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Recently I was awarded the title of 'Honored Activist of the Ukrainian Jewish Council'. I've visited Israel at the invitation of the veteran's association. I admired this country. I would certainly move to live there if I were younger.

In recent years I've felt more and more attracted to Jewish traditions. Perhaps, when one grows older one feels the need to go back to one's roots. Of course, I haven't become religious, but I enjoy going to the synagogue on Jewish holidays, Pesach and Simchat Torah. We observe Jewish holidays at home and in Hesed. Frankly speaking, only recently I got to know the names of some of the holidays. My Natalia supports me in everything. She goes to the synagogue where she studies the Torah with Khanna, our rabbi Moshe Asman's wife. Only in my old age I've opened up to the world of Jewish culture and traditions and I feel sorry that my parents didn't cultivate this love in me and that they didn't teach me Ivrit and Yiddish.

Glossary:

## **1 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

## **2 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

## **3 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **4 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

## **5 Gangs**

During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

## **6 Pogroms in Ukraine**

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

## **7 Jewish self-defense movement**

In Russia Jews organized self- defense groups to protect the Jewish population and Jewish property from the rioting mobs in pogroms, which often occurred in compliance with the authorities and, at

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

## **8 Fighting battalion**

People's volunteer corps during World War II; its soldiers patrolled towns, dug trenches and kept an eye on buildings during night bombing raids. Students often volunteered for these fighting battalions.

## **9 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

## **10 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

## **11 Common name**

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

## **12 Realschule**

Secondary school for boys. Students studied mathematics, physics, natural history, foreign languages and drawing. After finishing this school they could enter higher industrial and agricultural educational institutions.

## **13 Greens**

members of the gang headed by Ataman Zeleniy (his nickname means 'green' in Russian).

## **14 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)**

White Army general. During the Russian Civil War he fought against the Red Army in the South of Ukraine.

## **15 Party Schools**

They were established after the Revolution of 1917, in different levels, with the purpose of training communist cadres and activists. Subjects such as 'scientific socialism' (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy) and 'political economics' besides various other political disciplines were taught there.

## **16 Communal apartment**

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

## **17 Famine in Ukraine**

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

## **18 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

## **19 Enemy of the people**

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

## **20 Professor Mamlock**

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf - a friend of Bertolt Brecht - from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

## **21 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

## **22 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **23 Komsomol**

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

## **24 Kursk battle**

The greatest tank battle in the history of World War II, which began on 5th July 1943 and ended eight days later. The biggest tank fight, involving almost 1,200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides, took place in Prokhorovka on 12th July and ended with the defeat of the German tank unit.



## **25 Soviet Army Day**

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

## **26 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

## **27 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **28 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **29 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.