Victor Feldman

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Odessa
Ukraine
Interviewer: Nathalie Rezanova
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Victor Semyonovich Feldman lives in a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor of an old building with a steep wooden staircase. He has plain furniture in his apartment. There is a big table covered with a colored plastic tablecloth. The interior of his apartment makes the impression of tidy poverty. His apartment is stuffed with books. One can tell that they were carefully selected. In some of them there are the autographs of the authors. Victor is a vivid gray-haired man with shrewd eyes. Although he is 87 he has some boyish attitudes. He has a puckish expression in his eyes and an ironic manner of speech. He has a lifetime hobby: reading. Victor is one of the most widely known bibliographers in Odessa. He has an amazing soberness of mind and personal charm.

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My family background

On my father's side I'm an Odessite of the third generation. My great- grandfather's name is on the 1832 list of the blacksmith's guild of Odessa that I found in the state archives of Odessa region. My great-grandfather, Shymon Feldman, a citizen of Olev, was a blacksmith. The Feldmans came from the town of Olev, Volyn province. [Editor's note: Olev is a town in Ovruch district, Volyn province, according to the polls of 1897 there were 2,070 residents and 1,187 of them were Jews.]

I knew my grandfather Pavel Shymonovich Feldman. His Jewish name was Peisach. He was born in Odessa in the 1860s and was a blacksmith. He probably owned a forge. My grandfather was an atheist and hated the employees involved in a cult and attending the synagogue. He called them gots ganovim [God's thieves in Yiddish]. He wore common clothes: boots and a jacket, and in winter he wore a sheepskin jacket. He had a beard and moustache. I also remember my grandmother arguing with Grandfather Pavel in 1926 yelling at him, 'Are you a Jew, do you think? You are a katsap [derogatory term for 'a Russian' in Ukrainian], you eat salo!' and he replied, 'I'm a worker. I need to eat well. My eating a small piece of salo won't hurt God and if it does...' - further

he went on to scold in dirty Russian. [Editor's note: salo is a type of salted or smoked bacon without meat', eaten with bread and very popular in Ukraine.]

My paternal grandmother was born in Odessa in the 1870s. I don't remember the exact date of her birth or her name - it's just some gap in my memory. My grandmother was very religious. She went to the synagogue in Treugolny Lane in the center of the town. I remember her doing her laundry in the yard, which was common for housewives in Odessa. She took a very close look at the foam - what if soap was made with pork fat? She often made gefilte fish. She wore common clothes suitable for her age. She didn't wear a kerchief. My grandparents died in the late 1920s and were buried in the Jewish cemetery. They had three sons: my father Semyon, Miron, Michael and a daughter, Polina.

I was quite confused about my father's sister: she was Polina for my grandmother while for everyone else she was Lidia. My grandmother told me that Polina married an icon painter and converted to Christianity. When she got the name of Lidia my grandmother couldn't stand it and only called her Polina. Jews converting to Christianity weren't rare in Odessa. When working at university I met Professor Shereshevski, a lawyer. His father was an expert in Jewish philosophy. When Shereshevski junior converted to Christianity before the Great October Socialist Revolution [see Russian Revolution of 1917] 1 for the sake of his career, his father cursed his son in public at the synagogue and forbade him to attend his funeral.

It was different in our family. Aunt Lidia and her husband lived separately from my grandparents, but they got along well with my grandfather and grandmother. Lidia had no children. After the Revolution Lidia's husband, whose name I don't remember, couldn't earn his living by painting icons so he worked as a drawer in a construction company. Lidia visited her mother when she was ill and her husband also visited his in-laws every now and then. In the late 1920s they left for Berdiansk. After the Great Patriotic War 2 Uncle Michael visited them when he was on a business trip. They lived in poverty. He did what he could for them, supported them with some money. They both died in 1946.

My father's brother Miron was born in 1890. He finished a vocational school called Trud [Labor]. He became a cabinetmaker or carpenter. I have very vague memories of him. He was in the army during World War I and was awarded a St. George Cross 3 for bravery in a bayonet battle in the Brusilov 4 breakthrough. After the war Miron returned to Odessa.

When in the 1920s Torgsin stores 5 were open my grandmother exchanged all silver we had at home for food products. I remember I helped her to take flour home. She took my uncle's order there as well, since I remember that the receptionist asked her to scrub off the enamel from it as they only wanted silver. Uncle Miron got very angry when he heard about it. In 1923 my uncle and his brother Michael moved to Moscow. I don't know what he was doing there. Uncle Miron was a bachelor. Before my mother passed away we corresponded with him. Uncle Miron died in a hospital in Moscow in the 1960s.

My father's brother Michael was born in 1902. He finished a commercial school in Preobrazhenskaya Street. The school provided very good education to its students. They studied general subjects including Latin and Greek and two other foreign languages. My uncle spoke fluent French. Michael worked in a state bank. When he moved to Moscow in 1923 he began to work in the Moscow department of the state bank. He got married in 1949 and moved to Leningrad where

his wife lived. She was Russian. They had no children. Michael died in Leningrad in the 1950s.

My father Semyon, the oldest of the three brothers, was born in Odessa in 1886. His Jewish name was Shymon. I still remember what he looked like. He was taller than the average height, of stout built and had fair eyes. I remember that he and I went to the beach several times. My mother told me that my father was a member of the Socialist Democratic Party. There was such a fraction in this party that wanted to remove the gap between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks for their reunification. I don't know where he studied, but he worked as an optician.

My maternal grandfather, Paltiy Ghendler, was born in Odessa in the 1850s. Grandfather Paltiy was a bindyuzhnik. [Odessa slang for 'heavy truck driver']. His horse was called a 'bindyug' [heavy draughthorse]. Grandfather also kept an inn in Peresyp 6 where people going to the market could stay overnight and leave their horses. My grandfather's family also lived there. My grandfather died before World War I. He was buried in accordance with the Jewish tradition in the Second Jewish cemetery. I was at this cemetery before the Great Patriotic War.

My maternal grandmother - I don't remember her name because for me she was just Granny - was born in Odessa in the 1870s. She was the daughter of a merchant who went bankrupt. Her two older sisters got married with a dowry while she didn't have any. She entered into a pre-arranged marriage with a bindyuzhnik, my grandfather. I believe she suffered from this all her life. Grandfather was 15-20 years older than she. However, she had a baby every year as was common in Jewish families.

There were two rooms in the house: my grandparents' room and a children's room where all the children slept on the floor. If one had measles all the others contracted it. The weaker ones died and the stronger ones survived. It was the process of natural selection. Three sons and three daughters reached adulthood: Abram, Bencion, Isaac, Bertha, Sarra and my mother Rachil. One of my grandmother's sisters was married to the owner of a store. She had no children and helped her sister's children to get education. My maternal grandmother died in 1932. She was buried following the Jewish requirements next to my grandfather's grave in the Second Jewish cemetery.

Abram Ghendler, my maternal uncle, was born in the 1880s. He worked in the Odessa affiliate of the Russian-Asian Bank. This bank was eliminated in 1919 and my uncle worked as an accountant in various offices. Uncle Abram got married in the 1910s. His wife Nadezhda was half-Polish and half-German and my uncle converted to Lutheranism. They had a son whose name was Pavel. Soon afterwards my uncle divorced his wife. Pavel was a professional military and served somewhere in the Far East. In 1937 Pavel's daughter was born and Uncle Abram went to help his daughter-in-law to raise the baby. During the Great Patriotic War Pavel was commanding officer of a communications company. He perished near Smolensk in 1943. Uncle Abram, his daughter-in-law and his granddaughter returned to Odessa in 1946. He died in Odessa in 1949. He was buried in the Second Jewish cemetery.

My mother's sister Sarra was born in 1883. She finished a grammar school. During the Great Patriotic War she and her husband evacuated to Novosibirsk where her husband died. She returned to Odessa and lived with us. She died in 1964.

All I know about my mother's sister Bertha is that she perished in the ghetto in 1942. Our neighbors told us that Romanians took her to the ghetto [see Romanian occupation of Odessa] 7.

She was an old woman. All neighbors brought her hot meals when she was in the ghetto. She died there.

My mother's brother Isaac was born in the late 1880s. During the Civil War 8 Isaac was in the Red army. In the 1920s he began to work as a railroad conductor. He lived in a railway station and rarely visited us. Uncle Isaac perished on a train during an air raid in 1943.

Bencion, the youngest of the brothers, was born in 1891. He was a carpenter. Before the war he worked at a trade company. He was married, but they had no children. His wife perished in Odessa during the Great Patriotic War. He volunteered to the army and perished near Sevastopol in early 1942.

My mother, Rachil Ghendler-Feldman, was born in Odessa in 1887. She finished a grammar school and wanted to continue her education. One of her aunts agreed to sponsor her and pay 35 rubles per month. My mother went to Zurich, Switzerland, in 1905 where she studied at the Medical Faculty. She and her girlfriend rented an apartment. They ate students' food: cheese and chocolate. In Zurich my mother heard Lenin's speech in public and Plekhanov 9. She said Lenin didn't impress her: he looked like a zemstvo specialist in statistics and Plekhanov looked like a European professor. [Editor's note: zemstvo is a local self-government body, introduced after the 1864 reform in Russia, and consisted of elected representatives of all classes. It dealt mostly with local issues, had its own budgets, which consisted of the taxes collected from the local people only and was independent of the state budget.] My mother took no interest in politics and she thought that serious people didn't get involved in political matters. She finished two years [of her studies] in Switzerland and returned to Odessa where she met my father. I don't know where they met.

In 1907 my father was arrested for participation in an underground meeting of the Socialist Democratic Party and for armed resistance to the police in Odessa. He was put in a prison in Odessa and was exiled afterwards. My mother had to marry him on the day of his departure to be able to follow him. She submitted a request for permission to enter into a marriage in prison to the general Governor of Odessa. She obtained his permission and they invited a rabbi to prison to have a Jewish wedding. I don't know any details about the wedding. Later they also had a civil ceremony.

My father was exiled to the town of Yarensk, Griazovetski district in Vologda province. My mother followed him. She went to work as a doctor in the local hospital. Local residents left their town for St. Petersburg and Arkhangelsk where they could get a job and only returned home on holidays. On these days my mother had a lot of work to do: they drank a lot and got into hospital with all kinds of injuries. However, the most responsible process was childbirth, as my mother told me. She said that the assistant doctor she worked with could outclass all clinics when he was sober.

In 1913 Russia celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty [the dynasty of Russian tsars]. On this occasion amnesty for criminal and political prisoners was granted. My father was released. My mother and he returned to Odessa. The department of the Ministry of Education in Odessa decided to allow women to enter university. Many years later, when I was working in the university, I bumped into an interesting document. It was a request of the Ministry addressed to Odessa University: 'What was the result of this experiment?' The response was, 'Women soften the students' spirits'.

My mother was admitted to the third year of studies. On 4th October 1915 she graduated from the Emperor's University in Novorossiysk [Odessa University as of 1919]. I have a copy of her diploma. An interesting fact is that there were two marks, 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory', at her time. They had no internship. Upon graduation they received a doctor's diploma. Women who got higher education didn't change their last name and so my mother had a double name after she got married: Dr. Ghendler-Feldman. My mother went to work at a military hospital that the Jewish community opened during World War I. She received an apartment in the same house where the hospital was. This house belonged to the Jewish burial brotherhood [Chevra Kaddisha], one of the first public organizations in Odessa. They took the responsibility for a burial of the poor at no or minimal cost. They had a Jewish cemetery in their custody.

Growing up

I was born in Odessa on 29th October 1915. I was an only child. I was named Victor since my parents didn't want to give me a Jewish name. My mother finished a grammar school and knew Latin. Victor means winner in Latin.

My father took part in the Revolution of 1917; he was in Moscow with my mother then, but I know about it only in rough outlines. My father was acquainted with Vorovskiy 10, but I don't know any details. For some years my parents stayed in Moscow and I lived with my paternal grandmother in Novoselskaya Street during that time.

After they returned to Odessa in the 1920s, my father worked for Eurotat, a South Russian joint-stock company that supplied pharmaceuticals. My father polished glass and was a medical equipment mechanic. He died during a typhoid epidemic in Odessa in 1922. He was buried in the Second Jewish cemetery. He had a civil funeral. My mother was a doctor in Moldavanka 11 at the time. She blamed herself for his death. She believed she brought home this infection from her patients. My father and mother were very much in love and after his death there was a cult of his memory in our house. My mother used to say, 'Your father would have done it like that'. At her request an acquaintance of her painted my father's portrait, which was lost during the war along with the family archives, photographs and our belongings that my mother and my wife weren't able to take into evacuation with them.

Our neighbors were a peculiar bunch of people. In one way or another about two thirds of them were involved in the activities of the burial brotherhood; they either worked at the horse stables or maintained catafalques. There was a casket maker and a marble worker who carved inscriptions on marble stones. They were in Yiddish. Sometimes they were epitaphs: 'an honest and God fearing Jew died', etc. Other tenants in our house were bindyuzhniki that never drank vodka with employees of the burial brotherhood. Bindyuzhniki said that those earned their bread from other people's sorrow. There was a small prayer house near our house and one block away from the house there was a small synagogue. In the early 1930s they were destroyed during an anti-religious campaign of the Soviet power [during the so-called struggle against religion] 12.

We had a small apartment with three rooms. From the 1870s there was running water in many buildings in Odessa, but there were no bathrooms. Only richer families had bathrooms, but we were poor. Every Friday or Saturday we went to the sauna. There were many saunas in the town. We had old furniture in our apartment. My maternal grandfather lived with us and, besides, my mother supported my paternal grandmother who was living alone. When my mother was busy, she

sent me to stay with my paternal grandmother. My mother had few clothes - a couple of long jackets and a dress - and still she kept herself very clean. When she could afford it she hired a teacher to teach me French and German. It happened periodically and I had classes for a few months in a row. My mother didn't have time or money to cook something special and we usually had borsch or cereals. She was convinced that a human being was an omnivorous animal and had to eat everything. My grandmother cooked traditional Jewish food every now and then.

My parents were atheists. My mother used to tell me, 'While a human being breathes, it is a person, but when it dies it becomes an element of anatomical dissection. Doesn't matter whether it's buried in accordance with any traditions or not. Worms eat everybody in the same way'. Religion, therefore, wasn't a matter of any significance to her. My mother and father's families spoke Russian. Only older generations, like my grandparents, spoke Yiddish. My mother believed Yiddish to be a German dialect. I remember a little anecdote from the time when a Jewish Industrial College was formed on the basis of the Labor vocational school in Odessa. Our neighbor Shora translated the work Resistance of Materials and other papers into Yiddish. My mother asked him once where he got Yiddish words from. She said, 'Even Sholem Aleichem 13 doesn't have these terms in his books'. [Editor's note: Victor's mother spoke about Yiddish, the language Sholem Aleichem wrote in.] And he replied, 'Well, there are many words in German'.

We didn't observe any Jewish holidays. We celebrated Soviet holidays. Nevertheless my favorite holiday was Easter: we had Easter bread and painted eggs. At Easter I visited my uncle Abram, whose wife Nadezhda was Catholic. She fried cabbage with pork. At Christian Easter I also visited my aunt Lidia. I celebrated the Jewish Easter with my paternal grandmother. She was religious and her sons, Miron and Michael, made all the necessary arrangements for a traditional Jewish celebration. There was always fish. My grandmother didn't have any special crockery, but she washed all her utensils in boiling water. One of my uncles led the seder. I was even reprimanded once for bringing a piece of bread into the house when everything with yeast was removed from the house. My grandmother went after me, I replied something rude and my uncle gave me a good spanking.

1922 was a difficult year. There was an organization called ARA 14. ARA sent a few trains loaded with food products to Odessa. The chairman of our housing committee took a group of children under 12 years old from our building to the ARA canteen. I remember the maize porridge and concentrated milk in boxes that we had there.

We had Ukrainian, German, Greek and Polish neighbors. We, children, played football and the 'Cossacks and bandits' game [a version of 'Cowboys and Indians']: those who play divide into two groups and the cossacks are seeking for bandits and 'kill' them or take them prisoners. Jews were craftsmen, bindyuzhniki and tradesmen in their majority. There were also tailors and watch repairmen. I never saw any of the Jews wearing payes. Even wearing a beard wasn't a tradition then. Younger men were expected to be well shaved. Many young people even shaved their heads following Kotovsky's 15 example. [Editor's note: It is known that Kotovsky used to shave his head.] I remember that there was a negative attitude toward Lithuanian Jews in Odessa: they were very religious and the others called them 'litvak', which means a cunning and roguish person. [Editor's note: Litvaks were more traditional Yiddish-speaking and religious Jews from Vilna and its surroundings. The interviewee describes it as a general negative term for a cunning and roguish person, perhaps it is due to the stereotypes among more assimilated Odessite Jews.] There were

many nationalities in Odessa and there were many mixed marriages. Provincial Jews used to say that there was the 'fire of Hell burning many around Odessa'. [Editor's note: 'fire of Hell burning many around Odessa' is a quotation from the novel Fishka the Tailor by Mendele Moykher Sforim 16.] The process of assimilation began in Odessa at an early period.

We had many books at home. My mother liked Nekrasov 17. She knew many of his poems by heart. She also had books by Tolstoy, Pushkin 18, Lermontov 19, Korolenko 20 and Kuprin 21. In the 1920s a very interesting journal called Vsemirny Sledopyt [The World Pathfinder] was published in Moscow. It published works by Jack London, and a complete set of works of Herbert Wells. [H G. Wells, 1866-1946: English novelist and journalist, famous for his science-fiction works, including The Time Machine, with their prophetic depictions of the triumphs of technology as well as the horrors of 20th-century warfare.] Jack London was a favorite writer of my generation. [Jack London, real name: John Griffith London, 1876-1916: American writer whose work combined powerful realism and humanitarian sentiment.] Martin Eden, the main character of one of his novels, was an idol for my friends. We also had Ivanhoe by [Sir] Walter Scott, The Three Musketeers by [Alexandre] Dumas, With Fire and Sword by H. Sienkiewicz and other books. [Sienkiewicz Henryk, 1846-1916: Polish writer, who emerged as Poland's foremost novelist with the publication of With Fire and Sword; his most popular work is Quo Vadis, a historical novel about the first Christians in ancient Rome. He won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1905.]

I remember an old man whose last name was Tzyglis visiting us in 1929-1930. He may have been my mother's patient or a distant relative. My mother told me that when he was young he belonged to a group of young Jewish people who spoke for the establishment of a Jewish state. Since I was growing up in the yard and at school I didn't quite listen to talks at home. I had learnt the slogan of the time: 'Away, away with monarchs, rabbis and priests! We shall climb the heavens to do away with all Gods!'

I started school in 1921. There were a number of Jewish schools in Odessa. Representatives of the department of education came to see my mother trying to convince her to send me to a Jewish school, but she refused. I witnessed the Jewish school fading away in Odessa in the 1930s. Later, when I worked as a teacher of history in a special artillery school, the director of the only Jewish school left in town came to our school to complain that there weren't enough pupils to keep the school operating in the town although 30% of its population was Jewish.

There were pupils of various nationalities in my school, but there was no anti-Semitism. I was very fond of history, but we really had more, I'd say, of social science studies than history. Teaching of foreign languages was very poor. I knew German a little. In 1930, after finishing the 7th grade, I went to study at a Rabfak 22. I shared a room with a man who was married and had children. He was also a party member. Rabfak graduates were well-educated. They formed a new generation of Soviet intellectuals. After finishing the Rabfak school I entered a pedagogical college. There was a good collection of books by Russian and foreign authors in the college library. I became a Komsomol 23 member in college. I was your typical young Soviet man who believed in everything good. I doubted Marx' theory of being absolutely right for the first time when I was a student at the Faculty of History, but there were no disputes allowed on such subjects.

The famine 24 that seized Ukraine in 1933 was horrific. Villagers were escaping to towns. There were swollen people lying in the streets begging for a piece of bread. I had meals in our Rabfak

canteen in the dairy building at the New Market. We had soybeans for the most part and were told that soybeans were a worthy replacement of any other food products. This food wasn't enough for us. The Komsomol committee of our Rabfak school organized a students' crew of loaders. We worked in three shifts at Odessa's Voroshylov 25 canned food factory. I even remember that the department of the factory I worked in made eggplant stew cans for export. They explained to us that the state needed hard currency to buy tractors for kolkhoz 26 purposes. We believed that it was justified and reasonable. Students received 400 grams of bread and loaders received 600- 800 grams per day. Besides, there was a canteen at the factory where we could have up to three bowls of borsch. I was young and it was no problem for me to work an eight-hour day loading 50-kilo boxes. In this way I managed through the year of 1933. There were food coupons introduced and each person could receive 500 grams of bread and some cereals. Fish and sunflower oil was sold at the market, but it was way too expensive.

At 5 o'clock in the morning we went fishing at the beach near Lanjeron [a town beach]. Within two to three hours we could catch up to two dozens of bullheads. We went to Grecheskaya Square where we exchange these bullheads for a piece of bread or cigarettes. There was sufficient food before the war and utility supplies were very inexpensive.

I liked walking on the beach, swimming and sailing. I learned to swim when I was in the 2nd grade. My friends and I went to Lanjeron or Austrian beach on the outer side of the pier. In Odessa we went to the Opera and Russian Drama Theater. The Jewish Theater was very popular in the 1930s. It was a Jewish cultural center. Its performances were always sold out. They were in Yiddish and it was mainly attended by those Jews whose mother tongue was Yiddish. I didn't go to the Jewish Theater. I only spoke Russian and wasn't interested in performances in Yiddish. My friends and I were cinema-goers. I can still remember popular [prewar] Soviet films such as Chapaev, A Start in Life and Goalkeeper. We got together for parties where we danced and sang. We didn't drink much, even though there were many wine cellars in Odessa when I was a student. Many young people smoked, but I managed to give up.

I met my first wife, Valentina Umanskaya, when I was a 1st-year student. She was a student of the Faculty of History, too. Her mother was a teacher. She died before we met. Her father, Samuel Umanski, was a blacksmith. He was a very old man by the time I met Valentina. She had two sisters and a brother. Her older sister worked at a garment factory. She perished in Odessa during World War II. Her other sister was a teacher. She was in evacuation during the war. Her son Senia finished communications college. In the 1970s they moved to the US where Senia worked as an electrician in the New York metro. Later he became an engineer. His wife Tatiana is Russian. We keep in touch. They often travel to Odessa and visit us. Zinaida died in the 1990s. I had very good relationships with my in-laws. Her family wasn't religious, but not as assimilated as my family. Her sisters spoke Yiddish at home.

We got married in April 1938. We only had a civil ceremony. After the wedding we lived with my mother. Our son Semyon, named after my father, was born in 1940. He was a healthy boy, quite like his grandfather.

In 1937 [during the Great Terror] 27 I was a college student. Quite a few of our lecturers disappeared. Our first lecturer in pedagogic was arrested, than another one and only the third one finished our course of lectures. Our brilliant teachers of history, Gordievski and Arnautov, were

arrested. Between 1932-1937 many of my father's acquaintances were arrested as well. They were members of the RSDP before 1920 and took part in the Revolution. They often came to see us. They all disappeared in 1937. My mother didn't say a word regarding this subject. I knew a priest from Slobodka 28, a very educated man. He was executed, probably on false charges.

During the war

22nd June 1941 was going to be a leisurely day for me. I took my one-year- old son to Lanjeron in the morning. On our way back home I heard an announcement about the beginning of the war on the radio. We had only one feeling: we had to save our motherland! I went to the military mobilization office immediately. Since I was shortsighted their verdict was that I was only partially fit for military service. Men like me with all kinds of restrictions were taken to Kherson. From there we went to Dnepropetrovsk by boat. We stayed in a field camp on the bank of the Dnieper River.

I stayed two weeks maximum in the camp. One day a truck escorted by a frontier captain and a few soldiers delivered boxes of weapons to our camp. We were given rifles and uniforms and crossed the Dnieper. We walked for about ten hours before we stopped and entrenched ourselves. Some trucks delivered some loads to the location. The frontiers unloaded them and took some boxes to the bank of the Dnieper. We were supposed to escort them. At that moment a group of German motorcyclists showed up firing at us. We fired back and they retreated. In about an hour we were bombarded with mines and the captain ordered us to retreat to the Dnieper. He said, 'Well, guys, you've done your job and now go cross the river back to your place'. There was nothing to cross the river on, but some logs and planks. Those from Nikolaev, Kherson and Odessa could swim to cross the Dnieper while others were less fortunate, and, I believe, many of them perished then.

I managed to get to the opposite bank about three kilometers down the stream. We returned to our initial location and registered with the retreating military units. My military unit arrived in Kharkov where I had a medical check up. I and a few other men who had health problems were released from military service. By that time I had received a letter from uncle Abram. He told me where my mother, wife and son were.

My mother evacuated with the plant since she worked at the clinic and at the medical office of the plant. My wife and my one-year-old son were with her. They only had one day to get ready to evacuate. They could only take hand luggage with them. They just locked the apartment. They arrived at Makhachkala from where my mother was directed to move to Agdam [Azerbaijan, 1,400 km from Odessa]. I went to where they were by trains. I was registered at the local military registry office and employed as an attendant at the local hospital.

Agdam is located at the border between Nagorny Karabach and Azerbaijan. [Editor's note: Nagorny Karabach is an autonomous region in Azerbaijan, formed in 1923.] Its population consisted of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russians who had come from Kuban escaping from collectivization 29. There were no national conflicts in the area. My mother was a doctor and doctors were always respected. My wife was an elementary school teacher. There were very hard living conditions. We received 400-500 grams of bread per day. Local women picked mulberries. They spread a bed sheet under a tree, shook a tree and picked berries that they boiled with water in huge bowls. This became sort of a jelly that they spread on bread and flat cookies. Corn, cereals, fruit, raisins and dried apricots were sold at the market. My mother and wife sold all their jewelry in Agdam: my

mother's rings, chain and a gold watch - everything, but her wedding ring. My wife Valentina sold her mother's gift: an amber necklace.

I worked in hospital from morning till night. I was also the manager of the club in this hospital and I was the Information Bureau news reporter. Newspapers and local radio were the only sources of information. Patients got into our hospital after they were wounded for the second of third time. Doctors used naftalan for their treatment. Naftalan was oil with organic substances. It was used to treat injuries. It was used like curative mud to help the healing. The hospital smelled of oil and the bandages were of black color.

Post-war

We returned to Odessa in early 1945. We couldn't get our apartment back. All I had from our prewar belongings was my fork with an ivory handle. My mother got a small eight square meter room in Ekaterininskaya Street in the center of the town where we lived together. Semyon always slept in the same bed as his grandmother since there was no space to have another bed in the room. She recited poems of Nekrasov to him before his bedtime. My mother worked until almost the last day of her life. She died in Odessa in 1963.

Odessa changed a lot after the war. With the Romanians in power some private businesses were allowed and there were some private stores left in town after the war. Local girls were dressed much better than those who returned from evacuation. Later a group of girls, former veterans of the war, entered colleges: they were called 'green overcoats'. After the war Great Britain provided some assistance and girls who had been at the front wore English uniforms and green overcoats made of very soft wool. Girls used to alter them to make dresses. Young people felt fewer restrictions in their relationships with girls - this was an aftereffect of the war. Jewish people were entering into mixed marriages.

After the war I began to work at the scientific library of Odessa University. I thought it wasn't to be a permanent job, but I saw there books from the library of Count Vorontsov 30, I got very fond of it and stayed. [Editor's note: Books from the library of Vorontsov are kept in the scientific library of Odessa University.] This collection of books was collected by three generations of the family. It contains books in 27 languages. In the course of years I prepared a fundamental work about the library of Count Vorontsov that was published in the almanac of a bibliophile. I became a bibliographer and some people say I'm a good one. Many students and lecturers had my assistance when preparing their thesis. A few years ago I sat on a bench in Palais Royal [editor's note: this is how Odessites call the garden near the Odessa Opera House] when two gentlemen who were in high spirits approached me and one said, 'Victor Semyonovich, you are still here?!' I replied, 'Yes, that's me, but I don't remember you'. That man said, 'You can't remember me, I was finishing Law Department 37 years ago and you helped me with my thesis'.

Anti-Semitism was strong in 1949-1953. From the very beginning my friends and I understood that the Doctors' Plot 31 was made up. We understood that Stalin was deliberately looking for scapegoats. The situation in the country was very hard and he was looking for someone to blame. My mother wasn't afraid of working as a doctor. She didn't make any comments in this regard, either. This process didn't have any impact on me. I was far from politics and wasn't a member of the Party. Hundreds of people visited me with their questions. I slept about four hours a night since I always came home with a pile of books to study. I was all involved in work.

On the day of Stalin's death we heard an official announcement on the radio. People were silent. Then we were on guard in front of his bust wearing our mourning armbands. Some people cried. Some were skeptical about Stalin. One of my acquaintances said, 'Victor, this man with moustache joined a better world'. We took turns to stand on guard by his bust for three days. We didn't talk. We could still remember 1937.

My first wife died in 1957; she was buried in the international cemetery. After she died her sister Zinaida helped me a lot. She also had a son who was the same age as my Semyon. Semyon often stayed with them. I had a low salary, but it was enough to buy food. It was more difficult with clothes and shoes, but I could fix shoes. Sometimes we wore shoes for a long time. My son cared a lot about the memory of his mother. He was rather unhappy when I had an affair with a woman whom he didn't like at all. However, he never spoke his mind, just avoided her. He took away all his mother's photographs from my home then.

I was determined about my attitude toward Khrushchev's 32 'thaw': I believed that those people who came to power were able to improve the people's situation. [Editor's note: Victor means the softening of the Soviet regime.] In the 1950s I had a very negative attitude towards the human resources policy of the Soviet power. Therefore, I was rather positive about the 'thaw' period and was convinced that everything was going to be fine from then on. The only thing I didn't like was the too active position of Khrushchev. He destroyed everything he came to doing. I believe the history of development of virgin soils to have been a criminal act.

The 1960s were the years of certain prosperity. Our salaries quite satisfied our needs. We got an opportunity to buy clothes and household goods. Men of my surrounding dreamed of a mackintosh and felt hat. I had my dream come true: my wife's brother made me a coat. I wasn't a dandy, but I had some ambitions.

My son Semyon entered the Faculty of Chemistry of Odessa University in 1959. He married Irina Konstantinova in 1962, when he was a 4th-year student. Her father was a military sailor and her family was much better off than we. My son faced anti-Semitism when two of his friends were admitted to postgraduate studies after finishing university while he wasn't for some farfetched reason. He had been told there were no more places. Upon graduation my son went to the army where he served two years. Then he was recruited again and promoted to the rank of first lieutenant. He lived with his wife in her mother's apartment in Vorontsovski Lane in the center of the town. Semyon went to work as an engineer at the laboratory of the university. His daughter Valentina was born in 1963.

I get along very well with my daughter-in-law. Things don't work very well with my granddaughter Valentina though. I don't quite understand her lifestyle, but it's her business. My granddaughter does very well and is an intelligent girl. She is an economist. What I don't like about her generation is that they don't read books. Her husband Vadim is Russian. My great-granddaughter Sasha is 14 years old.

I was quite indifferent to the Jewish emigration to Israel that started in the early 1970s. I didn't quite understand why they wanted to leave, but I understood that it was some new process. Besides, Jews began to leave this country after a certain pressure when many Jews were fired from their management positions and when a selection system was introduced in higher educational institutions.

I remarried in 1978. My second wife, Olga Notkina, also worked at the university library. I moved into her apartment in a basement. I gave my apartment in Ekaterininskaya Street to my son. Shortly afterwards we received an apartment from the district executive committee, and Olga gave her apartment in the basement to Odessa Art School. We made some improvements in our apartment.

In the middle of the 1980s we and other historians of the town organized two clubs in the Odessa House of Scientists: 'The Book' and 'Odessika'. We, scientists, writers, teachers, gather once a month, listen to reports and discuss important problems. My wife Olga and I work together. I had many historical publications in Odessa newspapers. In 1993 Odesskiy Vestnik [Odessa Courier], one of the biggest newspapers in Odessa, published an article about myself with the title 'Patriarch of the History of Our Region'. I view it as a high evaluation of my work.

I had very hard feelings about the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was like a return to the Middle Ages for me. I believe that those who were involved in this process were so crazy about getting to power that they failed to look at a map to find out what belonged to whom. Roads and economy were torn and broken foolishly and absurdly.

I heard about the Jewish Charity Organization Gmilus Hesed in 1993, a year after I retired. My wife and I were invited there to lecture on the history of Odessa. Like in any other charity fund there is a group of sincere and honest idealists eager to help people and a large group of people willing to profit from working there. There is a Front Brotherhood group there - it unites Jewish veterans of the Great Patriotic War. They are various people: from the directors of a plant to workers. They organize many lectures for older people. My wife Olga works at the library of Gmilus Hesed twice a week. Her salary is 130 hryvna. This amount and our pensions make our living. We spend a lot on medications. Recently Gmilus Hesed financed an eye surgery for me. This organization does a lot: it's a brilliant system providing assistance to Jews.

I'm an atheist. The Russian culture is so close to me that I think that I understand Chekhov 33 much better than Sholem Aleichem. As for Israel, I think this state was formed by people sitting at a desk. It's just a reaction to a wild wave of German anti-Semitism. Isn't it amazing that a group of intellectuals formed a new nation in Israel: Israelites. They are not Jews, they are Israelites - it means the citizens of the definite independent state. I don't think this state is going to last long: they are surrounded by a hostile multimillion Arabic world. Israel shall exist as long as it is advantageous for the USA. As soon as it turns otherwise - it will be smashed. Many people study Hebrew, religious Jewish traditions and Jewish mentality. It is a kind of reaction to the widely spread routinely anti-Semitism. I think that Russian, Georgian and Lithuanian Jews are different people actually, and only common religion unites them. As a historian I have no evidence that the Jewish population in Ukraine is related to residents of Palestine, but it is a disputable issue.

Glossary

1 Russian Revolution of 1917
Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated

and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

2 Great Patriotic War

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

3 St

George Cross: Established in Russia in 1769 for distinguished military merits of officers and generals, and, from 1807, of soldiers and corporals. Until 1913 it was officially referred to as Distinction Military Order, from 1913 as St. George Cross. Servicemen awarded with St. George Crosses of all four degrees were called St. George Cavaliers.

4 Brusilov, Alexei (1853-1926)

Russian general distinguished for the 'Brusilov breakthrough' on the Eastern Front with Austria-Hungary (June- August 1916), which aided Russia's Western allies at a crucial time during World War I. Largely because of this offensive, Germany was forced to divert troops that might have sufficed to secure a final victory against the French in the Battle of Verdun. The offensive had other beneficial effects for the Allies; Romania decided to enter the war on their side, and Austria had to abandon its assault in northern Italy. His memoirs of World War I were translated in 1930 as 'A Soldier's Note-Book, 1914-1918'.

5 Torgsin stores

Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

6 Peresyp

An industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa.

7 Romanian occupation of Odessa

Romanian troops occupied Odessa in October 1941. They immediately enforced anti-Jewish measures. Following the Antonescu-ordered slaughter of the Jews of Odessa, the Romanian occupation authorities deported the survivors to camps in the Golta district: 54,000 to the Bogdanovka camp, 18,000 to the Akhmetchetka camp, and 8,000 to the Domanevka camp. In

Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot, with the Romanian gendarmerie, the Ukrainian police, and Sonderkommando R, made up of Volksdeutsche, taking part. In January and February 1942, 12,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered in the two other camps. A total of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered by Romanian and German army units.

8 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.

9 Plekhanov, Georgy (1856-1918)

Russian revolutionary and social philosopher. He was a leader in introducing Marxist theory to Russia and is often called the 'Father of Russian Marxism'. He left Russia in 1880 as a political refugee and spent most of his exile in Geneva, Switzerland. Plekhanov took the view that conditions in Russia would not be ripe for socialism until capitalism and industrialization had progressed sufficiently. This opinion was the basis of Menshevik thought after the split in 1903 of the Social Democratic Labor Party into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. After the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, he returned from exile. Following the triumph of Lenin he retired from public life.

10 Vorovskiy, Vatslav Vatslavovich (1871-1923) a Soviet Party and state activist, publicist and one of the first Soviet diplomats

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

11 Moldavanka

Poor Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa.

12 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.

13 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916)

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

14 ARA (American Relief Administration)

After the Revolution of 1917, the ensuing Civil War produced acute food shortages in southwestern Russia. By 1920 it was clear that a full-scale famine was under way. In early 1920 the Soviet government sent out a worldwide appeal for food aid to avert the starvation of millions of people. Although it had not officially recognized the Soviet regime, the United States government was pressed from many sides to intervene, and in August 1920 an informal agreement was negotiated to begin a famine relief program. Congress authorized $20 million, and the American Relief Administration (ARA) was set up to do the job. After Soviet officials agreed, hundreds of American volunteers were dispatched to oversee the program. The ARA distributed thousands of tons of grain, as well as clothing and medical supplies. ARA aid continued into 1923.

15 Kotovsky, Grigory Ivanovich (1881-1925)

Russian hero of the Civil War. He worked as an assistant to a manor manager. He was arrested several times over the years and was even sentenced to death, but this was later changed to penal servitude for life. In 1917 he joined the leftist Socialist Revolutionaries. He carried out a heroic campaign from the river Dnestr to Zhitomir in 1918 and took part in the defense of Petrograd in 1919.

16 Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835-1917)

Hebrew and Yiddish writer. He was born in Belarus and studied at various yeshivot in Lithuania. Mendele wrote literary and social criticism, works of popular science in Hebrew, and Hebrew and Yiddish fiction. In his writings on social and literary problems Mendele showed lively interest in the education and public life of Jews in Russia. He was preoccupied by the question of the role of Hebrew literature in molding the Jewish community. This explains why he tried to teach the sciences to the mass of Jews and to aid the people in obtaining secular education in the spirit of the Haskalah (Hebrew enlightenment). He was instrumental in the founding of modern literary Yiddish and the new realism in Hebrew style, and left his mark on the two literatures thematically as well as stylistically.

17 Nekrasov, Viktor Platonovich (1911-1987)
Russian novelist and short story writer. He fought in Stalingrad during World War II and published Front-Line Stalingrad, a novel based on his experiences there, in 1946. His series of travel sketches with favorable comments on life in the US drew Khrushchev's personal condemnation and Nekrasov was forced to emigrate by the Soviet government.

18 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)
Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

19 Lermontov, Mikhail, (1814-1841)
Russian poet and novelist. His poetic reputation, second in Russia only to Pushkin's, rests upon the lyric and narrative works of his last five years. Lermontov, who had sought a position in fashionable society, became enormously critical of it. His novel, A Hero of Our Time (1840), is partly autobiographical. It consists of five tales about Pechorin, a disenchanted and bored nobleman. The novel is considered a classic of Russian psychological realism.

20 Korolenko, Vladimir (1853-1921)
Russian writer and publicist, honorary member of the Petersburg and Russian Academies. His stories and novels are full of democratic and humane ideas; he criticized the revolutionary terror that seized the country after 1917.

21 Kuprin, Aleksandr Ivanovich (1870-1938)
Russian writer. In 1919, during the Russian Civil War, he emigrated to Paris. In 1937 he returned to Russia. Kuprin is best known for the short novel The Duel (1905), a story of army life in a provincial garrison, and Captain Ribnikov (1906), a spy story.

22 Rabfak (Rabochiy Fakultet - Workers' Faculty in Russian)
Established by the Soviet power usually at colleges or universities, these were educational institutions for young people without secondary education. Many of them worked beside studying. Graduates of Rabfaks had an opportunity to enter university without exams.

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 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.

25 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

26 Kolkhoz

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

27 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.

28 Slobodka

Neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa.

29 Collectivization in the USSR

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

30 Vorontsov, Mikhail Semyonovich (1782-1856)

Russian statesman and count, governor-general of Novorussia and Odessa from 1823-1844. His contribution to the development of Odessa is truly immense. Vorontsov was an energetic and dynamic administrator, happy only when he had some challenge to meet, and Novorussia provided enough of those. His wife, Elizaveta Vorontsova, is known for having had an affair with the famous poet Alexandr Pushkin, when the latter was exiled to Odessa due to his suspected anti-state activities. Pushkin dedicated a number of poems to Countess Vorontsova. In 1844 Vorontsov, by then 62 years old, was appointed governor-general of the Caucasus and commander-in-chief of the Russian forces there, in addition to his duties in Novorussia. He spent the next 10 years either in military action in the Caucasus or in developing economic projects in both regions.

31 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

32 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.

33 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich (1860-1904)

Russian short-story writer and dramatist. Chekhov's hundreds of stories concern human folly, the tragedy of triviality, and the oppression of banality. His characters are drawn with compassion and humor in a clear, simple style noted for its realistic detail. His focus on internal drama was an innovation that had enormous influence on both Russian and foreign literature. His success as a dramatist was assured when the Moscow Art Theater took his works and staged great productions of his masterpieces, such as Uncle Vanya or The Three Sisters. and also had some religious instruction.