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Family background

I was born in 1937 in Leningrad. It so happened that my whole childhood was spent with my daddy's parents. I didn't even suspect then that there were also mother's parents.

In 1946 mum took me for a trip to the town of Chernovtsy to visit our relatives where my mother's mother Sheiva Peisakh and mother's sister Sonya lived.

Only then did I find out that I had another grandma. I saw Grandmother Sheiva only about four times in my life. Even during those rare meetings we communicated
with her very little - she was in many respects a strange person. My mother suffered very much because of it, and was she never very close to her mother.

Sheiva was strange in everything: the way she spoke, the way she dressed. She was gray-haired, but dyed her hair bright red; she used extravagant make-up, plucked out her eyebrows and drew them on with a cosmetic pencil. That was not commonly accepted then. We felt ashamed of her. Her attitude to life shocked the members of our family. Sheiva lived with us in Leningrad for a short time. She used to go down to the first floor of our building, which accommodated a hairdressing salon, and tried to get a job there as a cleaner! And you see, she was not planning to work at all, had never worked in her life; she couldn't even keep house. But she was constantly looking for a job, explaining it like this: 'I cannot stand people supporting me, I should find a job.' We tried to persuade her not to do that because, in the eyes of our neighbors it was a disgrace. Otherwise, she never did anything bad to anybody and as a whole was a nice person, but always remained a strange woman who was not able to communicate with people. Sheiva was not a religious woman. In her heart she was probably a believer, but I don't remember her observing any Jewish customs.

Sheiva and her husband Aizik Peisakh first lived in the town of Beltsy in Bessarabia 1. I never met my grandfather Aizik; neither did I see any photo about him. Mother told me that he was bald, very short-sighted and always wore glasses. He was a respected person. All their lives Aizik and Sheiva were engaged in charity, spending a lot of money on helping the poor. How they managed to come into such fortune, I don't know. Mother's parents had four children, all of whom were born in Beltsy: two daughters, Haya, my mother, and Sonya, and two sons, Munya and Usher. It so happened, that of all Sheiva's and Aizik's children only my mother had her own kids. Mother's parents were well-off people and could afford to send their daughter, my mother, to study abroad. Each of Sheiva's and Aizik's four children received a higher education.

Mother's eldest brother Usher Peisakh, born in the 1900s, was a very good chess player; he worked as a pharmacist in a drugstore. Usher suffered from acute bouts of depression and was periodically treated in a psychiatric clinic. In his last years he corresponded with my mum. He was not married, he lived and died a lonely man in Peru in 1967. I know this little about him from the stories of mother's younger brother Munya Peisakh, who was a very close friend of our family. Munya had no kids of his own, only adopted children, and who his wife was, I don't know. Munya emigrated to Israel with his wife in 1950. We even received parcels from him: Munya helped his mother Sheiva, and Sonya, who lived with her in Chernovtsy, and used to send part of the packages to my mother. When he died in Israel in 1965 there was nobody left of his family.

At first Sonya lived with Grandmother Sheiva, and worked as a gynecologist. When Sonya got married her husband nearly divorced her because of Sheiva's strangeness. Pavel, Sonya's husband, was a Jew from a noble family, a very erudite man. He worked as a safety insurance engineer at a factory. He was a well-known person in Chernovtsy because he had higher education and was a professional in his field. Both of them worked and lived well financially. I don't know whether Sonya and Pavel had a Jewish wedding, probably not because everyone was atheist then and was brought up according to the ideas of Marx and Lenin. During World War II they found themselves in Romania, spent the war there and survived. They had a unique collection of books on art, which they took to Israel in 1967 when they emigrated right after the Six-Day-War 2. Sonya liked me a lot and always considered me her heir. She and Pavel didn't have children, and Sonya wrote me into her will in Israel. We 'missed' that will then, because daddy was afraid that correspondence with relatives abroad could do us harm. Later Sonya fell ill and ceased to write to us. After her death in 1976 the unique library and everything that I was supposed to inherit was lost.

My mother Haya Peisakh was born in 1910 in Beltsy in Bessarabia, which until 1918 belonged to Russia, and in 1918-1940, to Romania. I know about mother's childhood thanks to her certificate from the grammar school. The certificate was given to mother as a pupil of a private Jewish grammar school in Beltsy. She entered the grammar school in August 1918 and completed her studies in July 1928. In this certificate we can find her grades - they are mostly 'good' and 'very good' - and the subjects that she studied: Tannakh, Hebrew, Romanian language, Latin, French, German, Jewish history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, cosmography, natural science, history of Romania, general history, geography of Romania, general geography. For all foreign languages mother received a 'very good, except for Romanian and Hebrew, for which she only got a 'good.' Probably, she knew Romanian worse than Romanians. She also studied philosophy, law, hygiene, economy (national economy), accounting, singing, drawing, needlework, and physical culture. You can see when the diploma was issued, and there is a signature in Hebrew. We have a copy of the

same certificate in Romanian. The director of the grammar school and all the undersigned were Jews. The document is certified by the notary.

In her youth mother had a close friend Ida Vulykh. She graduated from a conservatory in Romania. Aunt Ida compiled huge bibliographic volumes on musical composers of the whole world. It was a very hard job. When she told me about her years of friendship with my mother she always mentioned that my mother was a very clever girl. My mother was a modern woman with a European education.

Right after graduation from the grammar school in 1928 mother went to Belgium and entered the University of Liege. She studied chemistry there. We have a certificate of the Ministry of Science of Belgium, stating that mother passed entrance examinations to the university. In spite of the fact that mother was from a well-to-do family and her parents could pay for her studies, my mother earned additional means as a governess, an occupation that was quite common among students. That was the time when she acquired her skills in cooking, sewing and housekeeping for her future life. Mother could do almost any work, and wasn't afraid of any challenges in her life. She studied well, but the emigrants had no right to participate in revolutionary activity. She studied in Belgium for two years, from 1928 to 1930, and then was expelled for participation in students' disturbances. In France the regulations were similar at that time, but she still decided to go to France. Mother entered the Chemistry Faculty of the University of Lyon and finished it in 1934. We have her diploma as well. My parents met and fell in love with each other in 1932 in France.

My grandfather on father's side, Mordukh Sasonko was born in 1879. He was a craftsman, he soldered, brazed utensils and saucepans. Unfortunately, I know nothing about his ancestors and about the family name of Sasonko in general. Neither do I know about grandfather's brothers or sisters. His family lived in Bobruisk in the Jewish Pale of Settlement 3. Bobruisk was considered a poor town and my father's parents were needy people. Grandfather Mordukh and his wife Grandmother Golda, were certainly religious in thier youth. Grandfather knew Hebrew well. In Bobruisk all Jewish religious traditions were strictly observed. They celebrated all the holidays. On Saturday it was prohibited even to light a match. A Russian woman would come and light a fire. But I can't tell you about the details.

After 1917 [the Russian Revolution of 1917] 4 when Jews were given the right to live outside the Pale of Settlement, the family gradually started to move to Leningrad and by 1919 they had all moved there. All father's relatives lived in Leningrad then, and they always maintained good relations with each other.

My grandmother Golda Sasonko, nee Rubina, was born in 1883. She was a beautiful woman. She could communicate very well with people and everybody liked her. I don't know how my grandparents got acquainted, or whether they got married under a chuppah. Nobody told me that. Golda was literate. She had probably received a home education, but I don't know the details. All her life Golda was a housewife. Grandmother Golda had three sisters: Gita, Khantsa and Mariana, and a brother, Alter. During the war grandmother was with us in evacuation in Kazakhstan. Grandmother Golda suddenly died of cancer at the age of 66 in 1949, before Grandfather Mordukh, who died in 1951.

Golda and Mordukh Sasonko had four children. Three daughters, Guta, Bella and Ida, and my father, Samuil Sasonko. Bella drowned in 1929 at the age of 19 in St Petersburg. I heard that they

suspected suicide therefore she was buried near the fencing of the Jewish cemetery, rather than in the cemetery. Ida died as a very small girl due to some illness. Only Guta and my father remained living.

Father was born in Bobruisk in 1902. I know little about his childhood. He studied in a cheder from 1909 to 1913, and that's where he mastered Hebrew. Daddy, according to Guta, his sister, with whom we were always on good terms, was a talented man. In imperial Russia only a very restricted number of Jews were admitted to state grammar schools and institutes, no more than 3% of the total number of students. That percentage, adopted by Alexander III, only changed after the Revolution of 1917. Daddy was, probably the only one in their district who was admitted to the Russian grammar school in 1913. Jewish grammar schools didn't exist. That was the reason why the Jews rushed into the Revolution: they were deprived of many rights in imperial Russia. In general Jews were very naive in their enthusiasm towards socialism. Even in Palestine they arranged kibbutzim, socialist communities.

The family was proud of my father. Aunt Guta and Daddy had advanced views, in contrast with those of their religious parents. They left home early, both Guta and daddy, because they disagreed with their parents and their religious conviction. Their parents believed that Jews could only marry Jews, and aunt Guta married a Russian. Guta finished the Gertsen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad and married a muscovite Grigory Kozlov. I don't know how she met her husband. She left for Moscow to live with him. Grandmother and grandfather didn't communicate with Aunt Guta for a long time after she married Grigory. Grandfather Mordukh didn't even want to meet Grigory at all, and wouldn't permit him to come to his home. So Grigory, without telling Guta, once arrived in Leningrad on business in 1939 and came to Grandfather Mordukh's house and introduced himself. Grandfather couldn't bring himself to drive him out. On a party assignment Grigory was sent to a village in Pavlodar region - on the boundary between Siberia and Kazakhstan - in 1939 and was appointed director of a state farm.

In total Grigory and Guta had four children. When the war began in 1941 our entire family left Leningrad for Pavlodar region and lived there all through the war in a barrack in the state farm of which Grigory was director. Grigory left for the front, just like my father, but was later considered indispensable in the rear and was demobilized from the front in 1942 and transferred to Alma Ata [Kazakhstan]. In due course he became Deputy Minister of Agriculture in Kazakhstan.

Daddy left home with a friend Zyama in 1919. Zyama later lived in Moscow and frequently visited us. He was friends with father until the end of their lives. He was 17 years old, and together they ran away from Bobruisk to Palestine and lived there for a few years. Zyama and father knew foreign languages after grammar school and wanted to see the world. There was disorder in Russia at that time. They got on a train and hid under a shelf. They crossed the border of Russia and somehow reached Palestine in 1919. Before he ran away father had entered an institute in Bobruisk and the family thought that he had gone to study. When they understood that he'd given up his studies and run away grandmother and grandfather were very worried until they received a message from him.

Later daddy told me how he and Zyama had survived in Palestine: they found a job - they took turns watering orange gardens each night. During the day it was impossible to water because of the heat. One night father was on duty, another night, Zyama. They earned a little money, and

then relaxed and had fun with girls. Once daddy fell asleep and the running water washed off the trees, and they both got fired. Zyama and father traveled all over Palestine, slept in the open air because it was so warm. In summer you could only sleep with your feet dipped in the sea, otherwise it was impossible to fall asleep: the heat was so unbearable. So they traveled, not having any specialty or means for living. They lived only on casually earned money. This went on until daddy came into a more mature age. When father and Zyama got tired of this 'fooling around,' they decided to return to Europe, since it was already impossible to return to Russia. Around 1923 they passed through Italy, then Belgium, and decided to stop in France. Daddy lived in Paris for a very long time. In his archive there is a photo of a Parisian synagogue. That synagogue is still there. Father was an atheist and a communist, but when he buried his parents, he made a Jewish funeral in accordance with the Jewish tradition, despite his communist beliefs.

Daddy had not received a higher education. He settled in Toulouse in France, and worked there at a telephone factory, where they produced automatic telephone stations. He joined the Communist Party there. At that factory a local newspaper was published. He participated in the publishing of that newspaper and was almost the chief editor. Besides that, he became chairman of MOPR [5], he was engaged in revolutionary activity, read the Soviet newspapers. They trusted everything that was written in our newspapers, they were so naive.

In 1930, when mother arrived in Toulouse, which was not far from Lyon where she studied, she came over to the branch of MOPR in Toulouse, which was supervised by father, to get some help. She had absolutely no means of existence. That's how they met. Daddy used to say that the only person whom he really helped through MOPR was my mother.

Immigrants in France had no right to take part in political activity. Father was arrested there once, put in prison and informed about his possible expulsion. When father was caught for revolutionary activity a second time, in 1932, he was deported from France by order of the prefect of police, Pier Laval. We have the document of his expulsion from 13th January 1932. It is a direction from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the French Republic to security services. The graph for nationality says 'Palestinian' because he arrived in France from Palestine. The paper is signed by Pierre Laval. Later on Laval became famous as prime minister of France during the German occupation, but eventually he was executed for his cooperation with Germans. Father was sent away from France twice, and this is the document according to which he was finally expulsed, because he obliterated the first document. Daddy was taken to the border with Belgium. He passed the frontier, reported to MOPR in Belgium and asked for help. They asked him who he was, where he came from and where he wanted to go. Neither daddy nor his friend Zyama had received any citizenship - neither French, nor Belgian. The Belgian MOPR contacted Russia through Germany, and Russia agreed to accept father. In 1932 father returned to Leningrad. On the border they took away his party membership card. He saw Russia and was very surprised by what he saw.

Mother was finishing her education at the University of Lyon, and in 1934, after graduation, father invited mum to come to Russia, to Leningrad. The time when people were put in prison for no reason hadn't yet arrived in Russia. [The interviewee is referring to the so-called Great Terror.] [6] Besides father didn't fully realize the insidiousness of the Soviet regime. If he did, he probably wouldn't have made her come at all. But she wanted to join him. Mother arrived in Leningrad in 1934 on father's invitation. During that period there was no obligatory registration of marriage, so they lived in a free civil marriage. Nobody needed a certificate for marriage then, and if you didn't

want to you didn't have to change your surname. My parents were officially registered in ZAGS [state bureau for registration of marriages, births, etc.] only after the war - maybe in 1956 or 1957. It simply became more convenient to have one family name, and it was better for my brother and me to have the same surname as both mum and dad.

Mother and father were very interesting people, very independent, and had their own vision of life. They always had many friends from Palestine and France, a large company. Mother was very hospitable. She was a modern, emancipated and well-educated woman. In character she was very quiet and restrained. Daddy, on the other hand, was always a quick-tempered man.

Growing up

In 1935 a son, Grigory, was born to my parents, and I was born in 1937. My brother Grigory was born when mother and father lived with his parents in a small room in a communal apartment 7. With his birth the family became larger, and I was to appear soon, so the room was getting too small for all of us. My parents had to pay a certain sum to exchange it for a big angular room of 37 square meters in a communal apartment near the main post office. That room was divided into three rooms by partitions. The house and the apartment exist to this day. We moved out from it only in 1965, when the house underwent major repairs. I was born in that room, and the six of us lived there: Grandfather Mordukh, Grandmother Golda, daddy, mum, my brother and I. In total there were 7 families in our apartment. After the war there was even a bed placed in the corridor, so crowded was the flat. The people who came back from evacuation had no place to live, since a lot of houses were destroyed during the war.

Mother couldn't find employment in Leningrad for a long time. They even had to address the party committee. Finally she got a job at a paint and lacquer factory where she worked until the beginning of the war in 1941. So mother worked before the war, and grandmother Golda was ill, therefore my brother and I were looked after by a nurse, but I don't remember her. I was too small. Because father worked at a telephone factory as a communications engineer in France, he got a job here in Leningrad at a telephone factory called Red Dawn, also producing automatic telephone stations, and worked there until the beginning of the war in 1941. He even participated in the publication of the factory newspaper as its editor. It was his public assignment. Daddy knew perfect French, and he knew German too, so at the end of his life he occupied the post of senior scientific employee, even though he did not have a diploma.

Already in pre-war time people understood everything that happened in the country. The majority of father's friends were arrested before the war and were serving their terms in camps and prisons, accused of espionage: some were declared German spies, others, French spies, and so on. Daddy was lucky with his factory situation because his boss, understanding what was going on in the country, and knowing father's biography, regularly gave him half-year business trips to the countryside far from the city to somewhere in the center of Russia. The company was installing a telephone cable there. During mass persecutions he was always sent on business trips. The boss was Russian, and they always respected each other. The people of that generation were internationalists, and we were brought up this way too: there was no difference for us between a Russian, a Jew or an Armenian.

During the War

In 1941 the war began, and our entire family (except for father) - grandfather Mordukh and grandmother Golda, mother, my brother Grigory and I - evacuated to Pavlodar territory in Kazakhstan even before the beginning of the blockade of Leningrad 8. Daddy remained in Leningrad and at first served in the anti-aircraft defense troops. Many people were lost at the beginning of the war because the country was not ready for it, and Stalin sent thousands of people - young men - to the front, and they had nothing to fight with - neither tanks, nor planes, not even rifles - therefore all of them got killed. So if you look at the messages sent by the military command units about the death of soldiers, the majority of people were killed during the first months of the war.

Aunt Alya's husband, our neighbor in the communal apartment, was killed in the first days of war and she was left with children - two twins and a grown-up daughter, Tamara. They hadn't evacuated. Daddy could sometimes come home - when he was released from duty in the anti-aircraft defense troops. During leave he fed Alya and her kids, allowed them to burn our furniture to keep them warm. But all the same, both twins perished. Only Tamara survived. Aunt Alya and Tamara left Leningrad after the end of the blockade in 1943 to join her sister in evacuation.

By the winter of 1941 the most awful period had begun, the period of famine in Leningrad, and soldiers of the anti-aircraft defense troops were ordered to collect corpses in apartments and in the streets. Daddy told me that the most terrible thing was to go to sleep as because of the starvation, not everyone would wake up in the morning; people died in their sleep. Then father was transferred to the front line to defend the Nevsky Spot. [Nevsky Spot is the name of the territories on the outskirts of Leningrad near the town of Kirovsk where vehement fighting took place during the war.]

Daddy was awarded many medals, including the medal for 'Courage.' Later he was transferred from surrounded Leningrad to the active army. It was great luck because, if earlier they were dying of hunger, now they were fed with porridge, but they wouldn't be given large portions at once - after a long starvation they could die of too much food.

During the war daddy developed a stomach ulcer. In the active army he passed through Kaliningrad, Poland and Germany as a communications officer. When our army began to seize the trophy German telephone equipment, daddy became a very useful expert. For example, they got hold of a small telephone station, which was necessary in action, but they didn't know how to use it. Knowledge of languages was a rarity, and daddy read the instructions attached to the equipment, understood it, and trained other soldiers to use the trophy equipment. The soldiers taught him to pronounce the Russian 'r' in return. Father even participated in interrogations of captives. He was employed as an interpreter. He completed service in the rank of senior sergeant in Germany.

Father had always been protected by someone or something. There were two cases when he could have been killed but survived. He had been wounded: a bullet passed a few centimeters from vital organs through the soft tissues of his chin. It left a scar under his lower lip. Another time he had just left the blindage when an artillery shell exploded inside. Everyone who was in the blindage was killed. So, twice in the course of the war he survived by a miracle.

We corresponded with father all through the war. I am not very skilful in letters, but mother always wrote to him. He sent some very beautiful picture postcards with views of places where he was at war. He wrote: 'We will win very soon!' All the messages were full of Soviet patriotism. After the war I asked father: 'You knew what Stalin was. Why did you fight for this country?' Daddy answered: 'We chose the lesser of two evils.' They thought that Hitler was worse. Mother brought cards from Kazakhstan, but they didn't survive. We even received small parcels from father. Soldiers had the right to send things to their families when the Soviet troops entered Germany. The officers used to send whole coaches of trophies: furniture and clothes. Rank-and-file soldiers were only permitted to send small parcels. Father sent us paper. He also sent seven porcelain figures of elephants, bone toys - all kinds of knick-knacks; empty cologne bottles painted with Father Frost pictures. For us it was something unusually beautiful. He had sent pencils, 6 silver teaspoons, which I have kept until now. Father sent all these things from Germany. When he arrived home from the front himself he brought a bicycle and a radio-receiver. After the war it was prohibited to listen to the western radio stations, and in general there were few receivers, but daddy and mum listened to the Voice of America.

In Kazakhstan we lived in a barrack. I remember a long corridor and, along its two sides, an infinite number of doors, behind each of which one family lived in one room. Meals were cooked in the rooms, too. Our neighbors were also evacuated people of different origin, Jews, and non-Jews. Relations were good. There was no anti-Semitism. We had three beds in our room. I remember that I agreed with my brother that we would take turns sleeping in my mother's bed. My brother was older and more artful than I was, and I couldn't count very well yet. He told me: 'We'll sleep in mother's bed two nights each - two for you, and two for me.' And all the time deceived me, saying: 'No, it is not your turn yet, only one night has passed.' It turned out that he slept in mother's bed all the time, and I, very rarely. Mother didn't intercede for me: I was a fretful girl, and Grigory was a kind boy.

I remember aunt Guta, to whom we arrived in evacuation, saying: 'I was afraid, that your mother, the spoiled French, wouldn't know how to behave on a state farm.' But mother was a strong-willed person and adjusted herself very easily to the unusual circumstances. I remember how we worked on the plots of land and planted potatoes. She sawed and chopped firewood. She could do anything. Mother worked as a teacher of mathematics in the senior classes of the state farm school. Aunt Guta was the deputy director of that school and she said that she was never ashamed of mother. There were only old and sick men in evacuation. All the healthy and young were at the front, therefore women had to do all men's jobs. I didn't go to school then.

After the War

After the war we returned from evacuation by train in overcrowded commodity coaches. Everybody was coming back from evacuation. It was possible to return to Leningrad only with a special permit or an invitation from a relative. Daddy sent us an invitation. We traveled for a very long time - several months - because the commodity trains didn't meet the time- schedule. At the same time there was an amnesty for criminal convicts, so we traveled with the former criminals. We went through Moscow where we were met by Ida Vulykh, mother's friend. We had lice in all our linen - we didn't wash. I was scratching all over. When we arrived Ida took us to the bathhouse immediately. If one has lice it is necessary to vapor them out. We came to the bathhouse, and I

was scratching badly. The cloakroom attendant asked: 'What's the matter with this girl?' I was warned that I shouldn't scratch, but I was only a small seven-year-old girl and couldn't stand such strong itching. In the underground I wouldn't step on the escalator for anything in the world. And no matter how hard they tried they couldn't make me do it, so they led me down the stairs. That's how afraid I was, being the kind of country girl I was.

From Moscow to Leningrad we went by a normal train, not in a commodity coach. The city looked alien. I didn't see anything beautiful, only strange things. Everything was destroyed. Our room in the communal apartment was sealed and remained ours because father fought in the war. The military people retained their property rights for flats. We had a secret wall-case in our room, and in that case we even found some of our things, and among them my favorite big doll. I wanted to return to Leningrad so much because of that doll! Other things didn't survive because they were burnt to keep warm in the blockade.

Daddy didn't meet us at the station that day. He was on a business trip. Now, after returning from evacuation, I was to go to school. I learned to read in evacuation, but I didn't know the multiplication table. In Leningrad I was admitted to the second grade where all pupils already knew the multiplication table, so I had to study extra hard. My favorite subject at school was mathematics. I can't remember anybody calling me a Jew at school, it hardly happened. In my class I had both Russian and Jewish friends. We paid no attention to nationality and didn't speak about nationality issues. But once, when we children were playing in the courtyard, someone threw a stone at me. I still have a scar. I know that it was not just an accident.

Daddy arrived from his business trip just before the New Year of 1946. Once I returned from school, and there was a completely unfamiliar man sitting at home, I didn't know who he was. I was told: 'This is your daddy!' He brought a basket of slightly rotten apples, and said: 'Eat as many as you want.' I ate and couldn't stop. Since then I don't eat apples at all because I had too many of them during that meeting with daddy. We talked a lot with him. We loved each other but we didn't really show our feelings: we never hugged or kissed; he was always at some distance. We were friends with both mother and daddy but we never had sloppy sentimentality between us. The reason for this was probably the military years that we lived through.

Mother kept the entire household. She was always womanly: she tried to look good, always cut her hair, always plucked her eyebrows and wore lipstick, and she always wore jewelry. She was not extremely beautiful, but she had a sort of piquancy, and you can see it on the photos. Daddy was handsome with a mop of curly hair, and women always liked him. Mother was a quiet person. She was never jealous. She never let others know that she was aware of father's adventures. After the war mother got a job as a bibliographer in the library of the Chemistry Institute and translated texts from different languages, which she knew perfectly, for post-graduate students.

After the war there were many trophy German automatic telephone stations. They were called 'step-by-step' stations. Pick up the handset, press button '?', the operator says: 'Hello', and you say: 'Please, connect me to such and such number'. Daddy was the only man in Russia, who knew that step-by- step automatic telephone exchange system. He was immediately employed at the company Hyprolink and became the head of the group. I met a lot of his subordinates. They said that daddy was a very prominent expert. They wanted to take him away to Moscow, to the Scientific Research Institute of Communications, but he loved his work in Leningrad so much that

he refused the invitation.

After the war new arrests began. There were three people keeping watch on father - to see what he said, how he behaved and whether or not he was a spy. Two of those people were his closest friends, recruited by the KGB 9. They were supposed to meet KGB representatives once or twice a week at the Finnish Railway Station and report to them what daddy had said, whom he had met. They couldn't reject that proposal from the KGB. Otherwise they would have been arrested. But none of the three ever told the KGB anything bad about father because he was not arrested. They couldn't hide it from father and told him that they were to 'report' on him. They were even paid for that.

After returning to Leningrad from evacuation our family began to live an ordinary life. Grandfather Mordukh resumed his crafts - soldering and repairing pans. In the neighboring apartment house there was a room in an apartment where Jews gathered regularly, once a week, and prayed. Ten Jews met there - this was called a minyan. Grandfather called it a synagogue. Grandfather sometimes took Grigory. Grigory would just sit beside him and listen to the adults praying. Grigory didn't have his bar mitzvah there. Girls were not accepted. Granddad had a tallit, which he took with him. When grandfather died daddy took all his books and religious accessories there. At home we had two shelves (these books survived the war) with religious books and books on Jewish history in Hebrew with gold stamping. Granddad read them all. Grandmother hadn't read these books, but grandfather did, all the time. There were prayer books, the Bible, the history of the Jewish people. Grandfather was an educated man in terms of religion. He prayed at home; he enjoyed talking about Jewish history, which he knew so well, to my brother and me. But Grigory and I didn't like to listen. The stories seemed boring to us. After the war grandfather spoke about his belief in God: 'I believe just in case. Just in case God exists.' He had his own judgment, his own religious views and apprehension of God. He respected atheists, but couldn't honestly accept their positions. Grandmother Golda always prevented him from preaching to children. He tried to tell us something all the time, but I started to listen to him only after grandmother's death. I was very sorry for him and I spent much time sitting with him. I spent one whole summer with him. He used to say: 'You are going to regret that you didn't listen.'

While grandmother and grandfather were alive we always celebrated Pesach. Of the Jewish holidays in my childhood I remember only Pesach: there was matzah, galushki [noodles], stuffed fish, and that's almost all we had. Grandmother didn't try to force us to observe traditions. She was a secular woman, and my parents were non-believers. Grandfather Mordukh was already decrepit, hunch-backed. He had a long beard, and I thought he was very old. He suffered from no illnesses. He was simply a very exhausted old man. He died of old age in 1951 at the age of 72. He was buried according to Jewish tradition. A prayer was duly recited. In accordance with Jewish traditions, the eldest son is to tear or cut his clothes during the funeral. Daddy's lining was cut a little, and he even read a prayer (he knew how to pray in Hebrew). [Editor's note: The interviewee is probably referring to the Kaddish.] I remember it well because I attended the burial of both grandmother and grandfather. After their death Pesach was celebrated at home only as homage to tradition, instilled by grandfather and grandmother. We celebrated without prayers but always had matzah.

I finished school in 1954 and had no problems entering the Institute of Chemistry and Pharmaceutics. In 1953 when my brother Grigory applied he couldn't enter the college he wanted,

and only managed to become a student at the Mining Institute. In 1953 there was already some prejudice against Jews. I studied decently at school and consequently passed my exams well. When I was in my 2nd year I became acquainted with my future husband.

There was a whole story connected with Bronya Selector, my father's cousin. Bronya was the daughter of Mariana Rubina, one of my grandmother Golda's sisters. Bronya was a good friend of daddy's. When Bronya's mother died she was 10 years old. She lived with her father and she didn't get on well with her stepmother. She studied in a vocational school, was a very pretty girl, and some of her admirers helped her get a job in the radio committee. The mother of my future husband Garry Kolton, Alexandra Kolton, worked there, too. Alexandra and Bronya had once been very good friends, but for some reason had a quarrel and didn't communicate for some time. Later, after the war, Bronya began to work as a concertmaster in the Big Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic Society. In 1956 Alexandra's brother approached her at a concert - he was simply at that concert and wanted to have a word with an acquaintance. After that meeting Bronya visited Alexandra, and they resumed their friendship.

Aunt Bronya had one idée fixe: to get me married. When Alexandra saw me at Bronya's birthday party she liked me very much. She asked Bronya to invite me to the birthday party of her daughter Aida. I was seventeen-and-a-half years old. I said I was not going anywhere, let alone to unfamiliar people. But Bronya did her best to persuade me! And Alexandra herself called me and said: 'I ask you very much to come.' I couldn't refuse, and my brother and I set off to that birthday party. All the family was absolutely unfamiliar to me, but I'd already heard a lot about them from Bronya. I remember how I entered and saw the very charming smile of my future husband Garry. That's how we met.

Having completed my 2nd year, I left for Kiev for summer practice, and Bronya rented a summer house with Alexandra in Zelenogorsk [a resort near Leningrad]. When I came from practice, Bronya immediately told her that I had arrived. Garry was there and didn't show any visible interest in me. He wanted to meet me, but he didn't know how to do it. That time - 1956 - was a period when foreigners were allowed to visit Russia for the first time. There were many tourists coming to Leningrad and it became customary 'to go and look at the foreigners.' I lived near St Isaak's Square and Hotel Astoria [in the center of Leningrad], and there were a lot of tourists walking around. Garry began to show interest in foreign tourists, and then Bronya gave him my telephone number. Bronya didn't believe that Garry really gave me a call until Garry described her what clothes I was wearing. We went for a walk in the center with him.

I married him when I was in my last year at the institute in 1959, and soon our son Leonid was born. I had a very difficult pregnancy, I suffered from a severe toxicosis - I had nausea, I couldn't see or hear, simply couldn't live. We tried to have a second baby later and I was even in hospital for 'preservation,' but we ended up with only one son.

My husband entered the Physics and Mathematics Faculty of the Leningrad State University in 1954. Garry's paternal grandmother was still alive when we got married. She died later. His paternal grandfather had a jewelry store. He was dispossessed, put in prison and tortured, and died during the war. I don't know anything else about them. I saw both my husband's grandmothers here in St Petersburg.

My husband's father Abram Kolton was born in 1914. Abram worked at the Stalin Metallurgy Factory in Leningrad and taught students in an institute. He was a mathematician and mechanic, candidate of sciences, and worked on the theoretical fundamentals for the design of turbines. In 1941 he volunteered to go to the front, but after the Germans demolished the Dnepropetrovsk Hydroelectric Power Station in 1942 he was summoned from the front to restore that station. In 1959 he was awarded the Lenin Prize for designing turbines for Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Power Station. Abram was always a very modest man and disliked wearing his awards. Now he lives in New York, USA, where he joined his granddaughter Eugenia Landman in 1992.

My husband's mother worked as a teacher of mathematics in an ordinary school. My husband had a younger sister Aida. The children of Abram and Alexandra Kolton had unusual names: Aida and Garry. They didn't think properly when they were giving children such names. As a small girl she was called Lyalya, nobody ever liked the name Aida. And Aida called herself Lyalya all her life. In the institute she was known as Lyalya, and only when she came to work at her new job did she introduce herself as Aida. Her colleagues decided that she was deaf because when they addressed her as Aida she wouldn't respond - because she'd gotten used to Lyalya. Aida died at the age of 30 during the summer that I was on vacation in Belarus with my son, Leonid and her daughter Eugenia. We knew about Lyalya's cancer and it was necessary to take the children away. My husband's family was not religious, just like my parents.

My brother Grigory got married in 1958. His wife, Lyusya, was a friend of Guta's daughter. Guta was daddy's sister, who lived in Alma Ata [Kazakhstan]. When Grigory went to Alma Ata they got acquainted there and he began courting Lyusya. She came to Leningrad when he graduated from the institute. They got married and left for Krasnoyarsk. Their son Misha was born in 1959 and their second son Kirill in 1968. Misha married a teacher of mathematics at school, an Armenian by the name of Seda. They have two children who live in St Petersburg. Misha is a businessman. Kirill became a programmer. Kirill now lives in Augsburg, Germany, with his wife and two children. My brother Grigory and his spouse left Russia with them. My brother comes each year and we spend our vacations together. We had a very amicable family in general. Grigory and I call each other every 10 days. I love my nephews. Earlier we spent vacations together, but then, when our children grew up, they started to spend vacations on their own. When the kids were small we traveled to different places: Ukraine and the Baltic countries, including Latvia, and to Rogachev in Belarus. All our relatives were very close friends, and it was very painful for us when they emigrated for good.

It was very hard for me to get a job. From 1959 I worked as an engineer- technologist in the Institute of Chemistry and Pharmaceutics, where I had studied earlier. Then, in 1961, daddy helped me to get employment in the Research and Development Institute of Communications. They had a laboratory there in which I worked until 1971. In 1971 my friend helped me to get a position as technologist in a blood transfusion clinic in the city of Pushkin near Leningrad. I made preparations of blood. Our station was closed in November 1998. And now I am retired. My husband Garry is a professor at the Mining Institute.

When cooperative societies appeared in 1965 we had an opportunity to buy an apartment. There was a big rush for flats then because state-owned and state-distributed flats were put on free-market sale for the first time. Only those who had a per-head dwelling area of less than 4.5 square meters were allowed to buy an apartment. Mother and daddy were 'western' people and knew that sooner or later it would be allowed to buy and sell apartments, so they collected money all the time

in order to buy a flat and get Grigory back to Leningrad from Krasnoyarsk.

Daddy was a specialist very much in demand. He worked days and nights and earned well. It was the time of rapid development in telecommunications. Everybody needed automatic telephone stations. He worked so much that he hardly appeared at home. Father died in 1979. He lived alone for 14 years after the death of my mother and didn't marry again because he couldn't find anybody as good as mother, although there were always women around, and candidates were in abundance.

In 1964 Lyusya arrived in Leningrad from Krasnoyarsk with Misha. Later they were joined by Grigory. The Soviet passport system was designed in such a way that a man could only live where he was registered, which was shown by a stamp in his passport. Lyusya was registered in Krasnoyarsk. She pretended to have lost her passport, and when they interrogated her in the militia she said that it had accidentally fallen into a river. So she received a new passport with registration in Leningrad. All through the winter we lived together, and by the summer of 1965 Grigory's apartment was completed. In 1965 mother retired and was diagnosed with breast cancer. Metastasis permeated to her legs. She was sick in bed for a few months. We took her by car to show Grigory's new apartment. She died in December 1965. There were very many people at the funeral. Our house was to be repaired in the winter of 1965, so we found an apartment closer to Grigory's, 15-20 minutes walking distance, also in the Moscovsky district. Our son Leonid was 6 years old then.

Leonid completed secondary school, majoring in mathematics in 1976, and we knew beforehand that he would not be admitted to university, and we couldn't do anything about that. Leonid's school teacher spoke of his abilities: 'Who else should study at university if not Leonid?' Even in spite of the fact that my husband Garry had acquaintances at the university, nobody could help. The custom was to make special lists in advance, with the names of Jewish applicants who should be admitted. Leonid's school teacher had contacts with a man who regulated the number of Jews to be taken to the Faculty of Mathematics and Mechanics: he decided who would be accepted from 'half-bloods' [children from mixed marriages] and who from 'pure blood' [children with two Jewish parents], and the 'pure' were almost never admitted. And Leonid didn't want to enter any other institution except for university. He worked for one year and achieved good results in computer programming.

Leonid's cousin Eugenia Landman was admitted to university that year: she was a 'half-blood', her mother was Jewish. At school Eugenia and Leonid studied in one class and were always on good terms. Leonid won the city mathematics contest and even the All-Russia Olympiad, and Eugenia was the winner of the All-Union Olympiad, and received a gold medal at school: there was not a single year throughout her 10-year studies when she didn't receive an honorary diploma. [School children were awarded honorary diplomas for excellent results at Soviet schools during that period.] Later Eugenia married a mathematician Grigory Bomash. In 1989 they left for the USA and worked as mathematicians there. Eugenia died from a serious disease in 1999. It was a heavy blow to our entire family. Now her husband Grigory and son Ilya Bomash live in Boston. Ilya is a very bright boy, of whom we have high hopes. He studies at Harvard University.

The following year [1977] the person responsible for the reception of Jews into university told us: 'All right, if he gives us his word of honor that he is not going to leave for Israel, let him enter the

Department of Mechanics. We will not interfere.' My son passed all his examinations. Leonid married his friend Mary Schwarz, a Jew, in 1985. There were many friends and relatives at his wedding, and we had a party at home after their registration in ZAGS [state bureau for registration of marriages, births, etc.]. They didn't have a chuppah at their wedding. One year after the wedding a daughter, Zoya, was born to Leonid and Mary. In 1991 a son, Semen, was born, and in March 2002, another daughter, Alexandra. Leonid has worked at the charity center Hesed Avraham since 1993, and since 1997 has been head of this charitable foundation.

Democratization and perestroika 10 have influenced me as much as other people: it became much easier in this country to obtain Jewish literature and discuss Jewish problems. It became possible to celebrate Jewish holidays. Leonid and Eugenia went to the synagogue to dance on holidays, and I was there too. It was an interesting experience for me. It was in the synagogue on Chanukkah. I just watched, because we hadn't see anything like that before. At home we never observed Sabbath. I would not object if my grandchildren celebrated Sabbath. But Pesach, for example, I do celebrate. My friends come along, but we don't have any special ceremonies. But I would like it if somebody invited me to a religious celebration. However, I am not a frequent visitor of the synagogue.

I believe that Orthodox Judaism is already a thing of the past, not only in Russia, but also in America. For example, quite recently a cantor performed on tour, a woman singer from Los Angeles. Her singing, in my opinion, is already a blend of Jewish, Moldavian and Russian music, which sound in many ways similar to each other.

I am not indifferent to Israel: I have been there, but I don't emigrate only because my husband and son don't. I would go with them if they went. We went for excursions in Jerusalem, were even in an Orthodox Christian church. We don't have any objections to Jewish traditions in our apartment. There was a mezuzah at the door earlier, but I presented it to Leonid. There is an 'eye' - a souvenir from Jerusalem. It is always pleasant to have something to remind you about your connection to Jewish culture.

Glossary:

1 Bessarabia
Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

2 Six-Day-War
The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one

of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

3 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

4 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.

5 MOPR (International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters)

Founded in 1922, based on the decision of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, the organization aimed to protect workers from the terrorist attacks of the Whites and help the victims of terrorism. It offered material, legal and intellectual support to political convicts, political emigrants and their families. By 1932 it had a membership of about 14 million people.

6 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.

7 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.

8 Blockade of Leningrad

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

9 KGB

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

10 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.