Michael Kotliar

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Ukraine
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
Date of interview: November 2002

Michael Kotliar is a man of medium height. He is very vivid and energetic, despite his age and poor sight. He is a volunteer at Hesed. He has eight elderly people to tend to. He visits them at home and provides all necessary assistance to them. In addition he does work at the Museum of Jewish History in Chernovtsy. He gave us an interview at the museum and was very proud to show us the things on display. He was one of the people who founded this museum. His other hobby is tourism and he knows every house in Chernovtsy.

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Family background

I know very little about my father's parents. My grandfather, Haim Kotliar, was born in Beltsy in the 1860s. My grandfather and my grandmother Riva died as a result of some epidemic in the 1910s. My father, David Kotliar, never told me anything about his childhood and his parents. Only once, when I insisted, did he say that he had a very hard childhood and didn't want to recall it. In general, he was a taciturn man. There were four children in the family. My father was born in 1901. I knew his older brother, Motl, born in 1895, and his sister, Sarah, born in 1898. There was a younger brother in the family, whose name I don't remember.

Beltsy was a Russian town. In 1918 it became part of Romania. Beltsy was a bigger town populated by Moldavians and Jews. There were also Romanians and Gypsies in town. Jews lived in the center and Moldavians on the outskirts. They were farmers and wine makers. Jews were craftsmen and merchants. There were several doctors and lawyers among the Jewish population. There were a few synagogues, cheders and a Jewish school. Besides, there were a few Romanian secondary schools, a lyceum and a grammar school. People of all nationalities got along well. There was no everyday or state anti-Semitism before World War II.

My father strictly observed all Jewish traditions even during the Soviet times. I believe he was born to a religious family. He and his brothers studied at cheder. They spoke Yiddish at home, but they also knew Russian and Moldavian. I don't know how my father and his brothers managed to live

without their parents. When they grew old enough they learnt a trade . My father and Motl became tailors. Sarah was a seamstress. She was single. After World War II she worked at the garment factory in Chernovtsy. She died in 1982.

Motl had 15 children from several wives. His first wife died of some disease in the 1920s, something happened to his second wife in the 1940s, and he married again. He worked very hard to provide for his family. All his children moved to Israel in the late 1940s. Motl died in the 1970s.

My father's younger brother moved to Chernovtsy in the 1930s after he got married. He perished at the front in the 1940s. His family was in evacuation and survived. I remember his wife Nehama. She lived in Chernovtsy with her children after the evacuation. She was a baker. She raised and educated four children. She was a beautiful woman, but she didn't remarry. She was faithful to the memory of her deceased husband. In the 1970s Nehama, her three sons and one daughter moved to Israel. Nehama died there recently at the age of 95.

My mother's family lived in Orgeyev. It was a small Moldavian town located in the mountainous area of the Kodry River between Kishinev and Beltsy. Jews constituted the majority of the population. There were also Moldavians, Russians and Ukrainians. Jews lived in the central part of the town. There were rich and poor families among them. Jews were mainly craftsmen and merchants. Some of them owned stores and sold everyday goods. Orgeyev was a district town, it belonged to Russia before 1918 and then became part of Romania. It was a beautiful town embedded in gardens and vineries. The Moldavians were mainly wine-growers. They also grew vegetables and fruit. Monday was market day, and farmers from the surrounding villages brought their food products to sell them in Orgeyev. On other days of the week farmers from the outskirts of town brought their products to the market. They also kept cows and milkmen delivered dairy products to people's homes. There were several synagogues, a cheder and a Jewish school in Orgeyev. There were no conflicts between the different nationalities. There were no pogroms 1 in Orgeyev either.

My grandfather on my mother's side, Shoil Moshkoutzan, was a blacksmith. My grandmother's first name was Dvoira. They came from families with many children. Both of them were born in Orgeyev in the 1860s. I didn't know anybody from my grandfather's or my grandmother's family. My grandparents had 14 children: 13 daughters and a son. They were very poor. My grandfather worked hard, but he still didn't earn enough to feed his big family. He owned a forge and had an assistant. He had a lot of work to do for farmers. Whenever the landlord living nearby asked him to do work for him it was a festive event for the family. My grandfather fixed the landlord's carts or horseshoed the horses. The landlord paid him with money and food. This was the only time when the family had enough food, but it happened very rarely. They lived in a small shabby house. There were two rooms and a small kitchen. There were two or three fruit trees near the house.

The daughters got no education because my grandparents couldn't afford to hire a teacher to have them educated at home. Their only son studied at cheder. My mother was a very intelligent woman. I once asked her why she didn't study, and she said that her parents didn't even have enough money to buy notebooks. The girls had to work at the tobacco factory since the age of 10. It was hazardous work - they inhaled tobacco dust that was all around. They all developed consumption. Doctors recommended them to have better food, but it wasn't possible. There were days when the family only had mamaliga, a corn flour meal. Only 5 of the 14 children survived. The

rest of them died before they turned 15. The survivors were Haika, born in 1892, Makhlia, born in 1900, my mother Eta, born in 1907, Entsa, born in 1909, and the only son, Haim, born in 1902.

My mother's parents were religious. They went to the synagogue on Saturdays and on Jewish holidays. The synagogue was near their house. Whatever miserable and little food they could afford on weekdays, my grandmother managed to save some money to make challah and gefilte fish on Sabbath to celebrate the holiday according to Jewish traditions. When my grandfather managed to make some extra money before holidays my grandmother also bought new clothes for the girls. They spoke Yiddish at home and Moldavian with their neighbors and farmers.

Makhlia was the most beautiful one of the sisters. She had two sons: Haim and Yasha. They were all shot by the fascists in Orgeyev on the first days of the Great Patriotic War 2.

Haika got married and lived in Beltsy with her family. She had two daughters. Her husband perished at the front in the 1940s. Haika and her daughters were in evacuation in the Ural. After the Great Patriotic War Haika returned to Beltsy. She was a seamstress like my mother. She also altered or fixed clothes. Haika died in the 1970s. She was a very nice and kind person. Her daughters live in Israel.

My mother's younger sister, Entsa, married a klezmer. He played trombone in an orchestra. The family didn't quite approve of this marriage. Jews believed that being a musician wasn't a reliable profession. But Entsa's husband was a born musician and very talented. He played at weddings and for rich people. He had occasional jobs. They had two very pretty daughters. Before the war Entsa and her family moved to Ivano-Frankovsk. During the Great Patriotic War they were in evacuation, and after the war they returned home. Entsa died in the late 1950s. Entsa's daughters emigrated in the early 1970s. One lives in the US and the other one in Israel.

My mother's brother Haim got married and moved to Beltsy. He was a shoemaker. His wife's name was Surah. They had a daughter called Polia. Haim perished at the front. Surah didn't remarry. Her daughter Polia lives in Israel now.

My mother's sisters and brother were religious and respected their ancestors' traditions. Haika and my mother liked making clothes. Perhaps, this saved their lives because they went to study sewing instead of working at the tobacco factory. My mother became an apprentice to a seamstress. The shop where she studied made bed sheets, shirts and underwear. My mother told me that the owner of the shop was very strict and made sure that her employees didn't get distracted from their work. My mother was a very beautiful girl and the owner treated her with more kindness that the others. She had a beautiful voice and the owner liked it when she sang during work. She knew many Jewish songs and liked to sing them.

My mother moved to Beltsy in 1924 because it was a bigger town and easier to find a job there. She got a job at a seamstress' shop and rented a room that she shared with other girls. My father was a skilled tailor by that time. His shop was near the place where my mother worked. My mother told me that she became Miss Romania twice at beauty contests. My father noticed and began to court her. They went to Orgeyev, my grandparents liked my father and they gave their consent to the wedding. They got married in 1927. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah and klezmer musicians in Beltsy. My father earned well, and they could afford to have a big wedding party and invite all relatives to celebrate. After they got married he bought a big house in the main

street in Beltsy. He quit his job and opened his own tailor's shop. The workshop in the biggest and lightest room in his house. There was an orchard and a flower garden near the house.

Growing up

My sister, Riva, was born in 1929, and my brother, Haim, followed in 1932. He was named after my grandfather on my father's side. I was born in 1934. In 1936 my mother's father Shoil died. My parents named their next son Shoil, born in 1938, after our deceased grandfather. All boys were circumcised according to Jewish tradition.

My grandmother Dvoira was grieving over her husband. She wore mourning clothes until the end of her life. It was hard for her to stay in the house, where everything reminded her of her husband, so she moved in with us. She was a short fat woman. She always wore a long black gown and a black shawl. She was very kind and caring. She stayed with us for almost four years until she moved to her younger daughter, Makhlia, in Orgeyev in 1940.

My parents were also religious. They observed all Jewish traditions and followed the kashrut. We spoke Yiddish at home. My father worked from morning to night. He wanted to provide well for his family and have a decent Sabbath and other Jewish holidays. I remember Sabbath in our family. My mother went to the market on early Friday morning. She bought fish and a chicken. I took the chicken to the shochet near our house. Then I took it back home, and my mother plucked it and prepared it for cooking. She followed all the rules. Then she made chicken broth. She also made gefilte fish and dough for challah. Challah was sold in Jewish bakeries, but my mother preferred to make her own. She put the pots with food into the oven to keep them warm for Saturday. On Saturdays it wasn't allowed to start a fire to heat the food.

My mother also made cholent in ceramic pots. In the evening the house smelled of freshly baked challah. My mother covered the table with a clean white tablecloth and put challah and wine on it. She covered her head with a white silk shawl, lit candles and said a prayer. Then my father said a prayer saying blessings to Holy Saturday, the food and the children. My mother sang Jewish songs and we joined in. On Sabbath my parents and children over 12 went to the synagogue. They had their own seats in the synagogue. Younger children stayed at home and a non-Jewish woman looked after them. When the family returned we all sat down for dinner.

Before Pesach my mother took special fancy dishes from the attic. All everyday dishes and utensils were taken to the attic. We cleaned the house, removed all breadcrumbs and burnt them in the stove. My mother and my older sister Riva started cooking in advance. My father used to buy a few flax bags of matzah before Pesach. There were quite a few dishes made from matzah: pancakes, pastries and puddings. My mother made chicken, gefilte fish and chicken necks stuffed with liver, onions and brown flour. She made potato, corn and matzah flour and egg puddings. She also made honey cakes, star of David shaped cookies that melted in the mouth and strudels with nuts, jam and raisins.

On the first day of Pesach [at the seder] there were bitter greeneries and salt water on the table. Greeneries were supposed to be dipped into the salt water to remember the bitterness of slavery and Jewish tears shed in Egypt. In the evening my father conducted the seder. We [children] also got a bit of special red wine made from slightly dried grapes that gave it a sweet and strong flavor. There was always an extra glass on the table for Elijah the Prophet. My mother said prayers in

Hebrew. My younger brother and I asked my father traditional questions [the so-called four questions]. We learned them by heart in Hebrew and he explained their meaning to us. We hid a piece of matzah [afikoman] and my father had a gift for the one that found it after the meal.

My family fasted on Yom Kippur and before Rosh Hashanah. Children began to fast after they turned 5. My mother thought fasting would do a child no harm. We were only allowed to drink water. Before Yom Kippur we made the rounds of our neighbors' and acquaintance's houses to ask their forgiveness for whatever harm we had or hadn't done to them. We also asked forgiveness from our parents for being disobedient and from out playmates for fighting or arguing with them. On the next evening my parents went to the synagogue. They returned home placid and inspired. The family sat down for a festive dinner.

My father was rather strict with us, but my mother never raised her voice or treated us angrily, and we tried not to upset her. My older brother went to cheder when he turned 6 and began to work at the age of 9. He was a shoemaker apprentice. My sister had a teacher teaching her at home. Riva studied Yiddish and Hebrew. In 1940 Moldavia became a part of the USSR and neither my brother nor I studied at cheder. The Soviet authorities persecuted religion 3 and all religious institutions were closed.

I remember how people welcomed the Soviet tanks that came to the country at the end of June 1940. People believed that life was going to change for the better and that this power would give people freedom and equal rights. The illusions didn't last long. Soon arrests began. Wealthier people were sent to prison or into exile. My father managed to escape from being arrested, as he had no employees in his shop. My mother helped him in the shop whenever she had free time. The authorities confiscated my father's tailor's shop and he got a job at this shop. My mother was a housewife.

During the War

I was to begin my 1st grade at school in September 1941, but on 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. The war came as a surprise. We knew that Europe was in war, but we were assured by the propaganda that Hitler wouldn't dare to attack the Soviet Union. German and Romanian armies occupied our town at night on 22nd June. On Sunday the sky darkened from bomber aircrafts flying over the town dropping bombs on the houses, streets and people. The planes were flying low and the bombers shot at people with automatic guns. My father grabbed our younger brother and shouted to us to run into the garden immediately. When we ran into the garden we saw a bomb hitting our house. We lost everything we had. We were hiding in the bushes until the bombers left. My father said that we had to go to the Dnestr River and try to cross it. We ran along the ruined streets. There were people lying or sitting in blood puddles. I can still remember the sickening smell of blood. There were crowds of people on the bank of the Dnestr River. We crossed the river on a boat and my father took us to the railway station.

My parents, my two brothers, my sister an me got on a train. They were only freight railcars for the transportation of cattle but it didn't matter at that time. We were running away from the Germans. The train was bombed several times on the way. It stopped and we got off to hide. We had no food, clothing or documents with us. Whenever the train stopped at a station and there was another train with soldiers going to the front we got some of their food - soup or cereals - that they shared with us. We came to a village in Stalingrad region [500 km from Beltsy]. Evacuated people got

accommodation in the houses of the villagers. We were all involved in harvesting. Younger children were picking spikelets falling from a combine harvester. Then the Germans were approaching Stalingrad, and we got on our way again. We arrived at Fergana lowlands in Uzbekistan after covering a distance of 2,000 kilometers from Stalingrad. We were sent to a kishlak [Uzbek for a village] in the mountains in Middle Asia. It was a small village with very few houses. We were accommodated in a mud house with two rooms and a small kitchen with a stove. The Uzbeks treated us kindly. They sympathized with us and tried to help.

My father was recruited to the labor army. Due to his age he wasn't subject to recruitment to the army. He worked at the construction of channels in Uzbekistan throughout the four years of the war. They lived in barracks 10 kilometers outside the village with no comforts whatsoever, but they had sufficient food and clothing. My mother and I stayed in a mud hut. My father came to see us for a few hours once a week. My mother worked at the collective farm. She got flour for her work. We all worked except for my younger brother. I was 7 years old at that time. I was to shepherd sheep. I got a donkey and a stick sharpened at one end. I rode my donkey watching that the sheep stayed together. We were given some food for our work.

In autumn we were to go to school, but we had no documents. In order to obtain them we had to go to the district town. My mother wasn't allowed to leave work for even a single day. The chairman of the collective farm took the four of us onto a road and showed us in what direction we had to move to get to the district town. My older sister was 12 and my younger brother was 3 at the time. We got to the town in the evening and stayed in a local house overnight. In the morning we went to the registry office. There was an Uzbek man there who didn't understand a word of Russian. My sister knew a few words in Uzbek. She explained to him what we needed. She didn't remember the dates of our birth, though. He took it easy and issued four birth certificates. He wrote them in Russian and in Uzbek. He put our birthday as 20th September, the day when we came to see him, and we got on our way back.

My sister and brother went to school while I fell ill with typhoid. I stayed in hospital for almost half a year. When I recovered I had to work to help my mother. I worked for three years shepherding sheep, helped them with the harvesting and did manual work. In April 1944 we heard that Beltsy had been liberated by the Soviet army and returned home. I was 10 years old, but I went to the 1st grade of the Russian secondary school for boys. However, more than half of my classmates had also missed school during the war.

After the War

We didn't have a place to live. More than half of the houses in the town were ruined. We were accommodated in a small room in a barrack near a military unit. My father couldn't get a job in 1945 and decided that we need to move to Chernovtsy. People said there were many vacant apartments there, and the town was almost intact. We rented a horse-driven cab and reached Chernovtsy within a few hours. We liked the town. It was big and beautiful and Yiddish could be heard all around. There was a synagogue and the majority of the population was Jewish. At the beginning we rented a room in the basement of a house in an old Jewish neighborhood. This was the area of the former Jewish ghetto and the owner of the house lived there during the war. This old lady spoke Yiddish and Romanian. It was a cold and damp room with no running water, heating or toilet. My mother cooked on a primus stove. She stayed at home. My father found a job in a

garment shop. The money he earned was just enough to live on bread and water. We were always hungry, but we had known worse times during the war and didn't pay much attention to the hardships of postwar life.

My sister attended a typing and stenography course and got a job as a typist. My older brother went to work at a shoemaker's shop. My younger brother and I went to school. We got a room in a common apartment. There were six of us living in it until my sister got married. Her husband, Naum Shnaider, moved in with us and they had two children. Nine of us lived in this room for over 20 years. Riva's husband worked as a mechanic at the textile association Voskhod. My sister studied by correspondence at the Faculty of Mathematics of the Pedagogical University. Upon graduation she worked as a teacher.

I became a Young Octobrist 4 and then a pioneer. I was very proud of wearing a red necktie and took an active part in public activities. The majority of my classmates were Jews. There were also quite a few Jewish teachers, so we didn't face any anti-Semitism at school. The period of the campaign against cosmopolitans 5 in 1948 didn't affect me.

I liked literature, history and geography at school. As for mathematics and physics - I wasn't really fond of these subjects and never got the highest grades. My sight became worse due to the hard life during and after the war.

I finished the 6th grade in 1950 when I turned 16 and could no longer stay at school. My older brother was a shoemaker and my father was a tailor, but they couldn't provide well for the family. Life was pretty expensive after the war. A loaf of bread cost almost half of my brother's monthly salary. I went to the 7th grade of an evening school and worked as a shoemaker during the day. Most of the shoemakers in Chernovtsy were Jews. I didn't really like this work. It was hard work, and I didn't feel like fixing other people's worn shoes for the rest of my life. I joined a crew of electricians at the Selenergo association. I was an apprentice there. We were responsible for power supply to the surrounding villages. Our crew leader was an older Jewish man. He treated me kindly and taught me everything he knew. Later he went to work at the motor plant and I was appointed crew leader.

At that time, in the 1950s, I became a Komsomol member 6. I was eager to join the Komsomol league to be among the architects of communism. I became a skilled electrician. But this work was associated with business trips and thus interfered with my studies. I quit the job. A Jew, whose last name was Kantor, offered me a job at the textile factory. He worked as an electrician there. He needed a co-employee to work in shifts. I worked night shifts, but I stayed at work during the day, too, in order to learn from Kantor. The factory was receiving German equipment with automatic control, and I had to learn from Kantor how to repair it. In the evening I went to school. I had a good teacher of mathematics, a Jew, and became fond of mathematics. My sight was getting poorer and poorer, and I could hardly see the blackboard in the classroom. I asked the teacher of mathematics to dictate what he was writing on the blackboard and I knew the solutions before he even finished writing.

I was told that I could have a cornea replacement surgery in Moscow. I went to the ophthalmology institute in Moscow. I had a surgery, but my sight didn't improve. The professor who operated on me said that if I had addressed them earlier they would have been able to help me, but that at that time it was already too late. I returned to Chernovtsy and got a job at the knitwear factory. The

majority of employees at the knitwear factory were Jews. I didn't face any anti-Semitism there. I was a good employee. I also went to the school of tourist instructors. Bukovina is a very picturesque area, and I enjoyed guiding tours to blooming valleys and snow- covered mountains.

One day I was invited by the secretary of the party unit. He offered me to become a member of the party. It was my dream so I agreed. I believed in the ideas of communism. Lenin and Stalin were my idols. I entered the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism. I graduated from three faculties: philosophy, Marxism-Leninism and esthetics. I was very fond of reading classic works of Marxism-Leninism and believed in the bright and happy future of mankind. Religion was a vestige of the past for me. Upon graduation from the University of Marxism-Leninism I first became deputy secretary of the party unit of the factory and then secretary. I was involved in public activities arranging socialist competition between crews at the plant, performed our obligatory scope of work and surpassed our plans. On Soviet holidays we marched at parades carrying red flags and banners with communist slogans. I was well respected at work and there was no anti-Semitism.

I remember Stalin's death in March 1953. I was working at the factory when I heard the announcement on the radio about Stalin. People were crying and feeling lost. All of a sudden we heard the sound of sirens on the building of the factory. I was in grief and so were many other people. Nobody was hiding his tears. We felt like our life was over and we didn't know what was going to happen to us.

When Khrushchev 7 spoke at the Twentieth Party Congress 8 and denounced Stalin's crimes many of my friends, Jews, refused to believe it. Even an acquaintance of mine who had spent 20 years in the Gulag 9 thought that it was a lie. However, I believed what Khrushchev said and thought it was necessary to tell people about Stalin's crimes. I still believed in the ideals of communism and was an active member of the Communist Party: I attended meetings and spoke at the meetings, but I began to understand that there were different people among communists, some of whom were far from decent.

My parents continued observing all Jewish traditions after the war. It was a rule of life for them. They always celebrated Pesach. I respected their way of life. Although I was a Komsomol and a party member I joined them for the celebration of Pesach and other Jewish holidays. I didn't see any contradiction between my new outlooks and my respectful attitude towards family traditions. I didn't join them for prayers as I was a convinced communist, but I enjoyed the festive dinner on Sabbath. On Saturdays and Jewish holidays my parents went to the synagogue. They had their own seats in the synagogue. My father always made a contribution to the synagogue. He was a respectable member of the community.

My mother had special fancy dishes for Pesach that she kept in a box during the year. She also bought a live chicken that she took to the shochet who worked from home. All religious Jews knew his address. He was an old man and not afraid of any discontent from the Soviet authorities in case they found out that he did this job. My mother made chicken broth, gefilte fish, honey cakes and strudels for Pesach. My parents always had matzah on Pesach. Their four children and their families came to visit them on Pesach, and they were happy to have a family reunion. At Chanukkah my father gave all children Chanukkah gelt. When I think of my parents I understand how Jewish traditions and rituals have been preserved throughout centuries. I'm often reproached for not knowing prayers when my parents were so deeply religious. I reply that at that time my faith was

Marxism- Leninism. I had different values back then. I feel so sorry now that I didn't learn more about Jewish traditions and rituals from my father, but I was a communist and believed in the ideals of communism. That's my only excuse.

I was eager to continue my studies. In 1966 I decided to try and enter the Faculty of Geography at Chernovtsy University. I was a tourist instructor, a party member and an udarnik [advanced employee] of communist labor - these were my advantages to help me enter a higher educational institution. I couldn't prepare for the entrance exams at my parents' home with nine tenants around. My mother's acquaintance, who lived alone, offered me to stay with her. I recapitulated all school textbooks, beginning from the 5th grade, and passed my entrance exams successfully. I was the only Jew that entered this faculty. I didn't have any influential friends. I guess my knowledge, work experience and party membership played a part for being admitted. In total two Jews were admitted to the university that year.

I was successful with my studies and received the highest grades in all subjects. I was a senior student in my group for five years. I didn't face any anti-Semitism until it came to defending my diploma thesis. Representatives of the Ministry of Education in Kiev came to attend the event. They liked my thesis, which was about the development of natural deposits in Western Ukraine, but still I only received a 'good' mark for it. Later my tutor told me confidentially that the commission wanted to give me an 'excellent', but representative of the Ministry said that it wouldn't be politically correct. I was hurt but decided to ignore it. I was happy about getting an education and didn't feel like wasting time by trying to argue with the commission.

I got married in 1969 when I was a student. My wife, Polina Trachtenberg, was born in Mogilyov-Podoskiy, Vinnitsa region, in 1931. Her parents were assimilated Soviet Jews. Polina doesn't know Yiddish or any Jewish traditions. Her mother was a housewife, and her father was a wine-merchant. After the war the family moved to Chernovtsy. Polina is a poor housewife because her mother didn't teach her how to do things around the house. Her mother wanted Polina to get a higher education. Polina graduated from the Faculty of History of Chernovtsy University and worked as a history teacher at a Russian secondary school. Polina's father died in 1960 and her mother in 1972.

We didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding. I was a communist and didn't want to have a chuppah. I didn't want to hide things from my comrades. My wife didn't want a religious wedding either. We had a civil ceremony and a wedding dinner with members of the family. My father was angry that we didn't have a chuppah and didn't attend the wedding. My mother came to the wedding, but my father didn't even congratulate me. He never came to visit us. When my wife and I went to visit my parents my father didn't say a word of reproach, but he never came to see us in our house. My son, Jacob, was born in 1970. He wasn't circumcised and doesn't know a word of Yiddish.

I was offered a job assignment in the Novosibirsk Observatory upon my graduation in 1962. It was an interesting offer, but I had to refuse. I was already married. My son was one year old, and my wife was ill; she had a heart problem. I found a job as a methodologist at a tourist station. I worked there for more than ten years. I was awarded diplomas of honor, and my tourist teams were among the best ones in Ukraine and the USSR. I was very fond of this work.

Later I was asked to accept the job of a tutor in a club for teenagers. When I came to the building on the outskirts of town I found it damaged, dirty and abandoned. There were different children in this club: children from well-off families and teenagers with problems. There were even teenagers

who were registered in the militia for their conduct. We repaired and fixed the building, and the children got involved in various activities. We had different sections: a chess club, a tourist section and even a motor club. The children changed for the better and developed many interests. We got broken cars that we fixed and taught the children to drive. Many of the teenagers became good drivers when they grew up. We had wrestling and boxing sections and a dance club. I found enthusiasts that agreed to work with the children at no cost. The children, their parents and my management respected me. I retired after 22 years of work.

Polina hasn't changed. She is a typical Soviet person. She took no interest in Jewish traditions or anything around her. All she cared about was herself and her health condition. Our son takes after her. He didn't want to continue his education after finishing school. Jacob works as a locksmith at a plant and watches football matches on TV - that's all he likes. He was married for a short time and has a son. His wife divorced him. He doesn't even feel an urge to communicate with his son. He believes that giving his son some money is sufficient. Jacob has no future. I felt very sorry for him until I realized that I wouldn't be able to change his life.

When Jews began to move to Israel in the 1970s I sincerely believed them to be traitors. I couldn't understand what they were driven by, but when I attended meetings where those people were condemned and humiliated I changed my attitude. People shouted 'Traitors' at them at such meetings, especially when party members were leaving. They were fired if it became known that they were planning to move to Israel. The district party committee suggested that I made a speech to condemn the ones that were leaving, but I refused. Many of those people were my friends, and I couldn't throw mud at them. Later I was responsible for visiting those people that had submitted their documents to obtain a permit to move. I was supposed to convince them to change their mind. I talked with them and understood that every person has the right to choose his own country of living and way of life, and that there's only one place where people can be forced to stay, and that is a prison. My family didn't plan to move. My parents wished they could go, but they couldn't move themselves because they were old and ill. I was going to stay. I would like to visit Israel and I hope that one day I will go there.

My sister Riva's son graduated from a physics and mathematics school. Due to his Jewish nationality he couldn't enter Chernovtsy University. He went to Kazan, the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Republic, where he entered university. Upon graduation he became a post-graduate student and defended a candidate, and later, his doctor of science thesis. He went to the US to read lectures twice and then got a job offer in America. He moved there with his family. Riva, her husband and her daughter moved to the US in the 1980s. She wanted her daughter to have a good life. Her husband needed a heart surgery. He was operated in the US and they have a good life there. They are pensioners, and their daughter got married and has a job.

Shulamit, the daughter of my younger brother Shoil, and her husband moved to the US, too, at the end of the 1980s. Shoil and his son, Boris, followed them some time later. He was chief engineer at a design institute here, but he didn't find a job in the US because he was already over 50 years old when he moved there. He lives an isolated life.

My older brother Haim lives in Chernovtsy. He's a weird man and very rough with his family and relatives. His two sons had to go to work when they were young children. They moved to Israel with their mother at the end of the 1980s. Later one of them moved to Canada. He's a driver. The other

one was a boxer and a champion of the region. In Israel he became heavyweight champion of the country and later opened a sport school. Haim stayed in Chernovtsy. He didn't want to go with his family. He's a highly skilled professional. He's a pensioner now but often asked to do some work as an electrician.

My father died in 1984. He was a very hardworking man and worked until the end of his life. My mother buried him in the Jewish cemetery. My mother died in 1994 after the collapse of the USSR. I buried her according to Jewish traditions. Her grave is near my father's grave. I come to the cemetery to recite the Kaddish, the mourning prayer, on the anniversary of their death. Then I go to the synagogue. I terminated my membership in the party when I turned to the Jewish way of life in the 1980s.

When Ukraine gained independence in 1991 Jewish life revived. There are Jewish organizations, and Jewish culture has returned to our life. I began to take an interest in our roots in the 1980s after my parents died. I recalled prayers, holidays and traditions. At that period I wasn't interested in any party activities any longer. In the 1980s there were many TV programs and publications about various aspects of life in the country. We also got an opportunity to read about life in developed Western countries. We realized how much misery there was in our country. I knew that in a country, where the life of a human being belonged to the state and where industries and land didn't have owners to take care of them, there could be no order or improvements. I got disappointed in communist ideals.

I recalled many things from my life before the war and decided to help people to restore Jewish traditions and culture. I became a volunteer with Hesed and am grateful that I can be of use to other people. However, there are things that I don't like. I think, Jews have been spoiled. Before the Soviet power there was a Jewish community in Chernovtsy that took care of poor and ill Jews, but people still worked hard and tried to support the community rather than waiting for help from the outside. Now, I believe, Jews are turning into parasites waiting for Jews in foreign countries to provide for them. Many of those that proudly call themselves Jews have very distant Jewish roots and would have never revealed the fact that their grandmother was a Jew before.

Beginning from school years Jewish children are raised to become spongers: they get free tours, clothing and meals. Jews have survived throughout their history learning to be smarter and more intelligent than others. This helped our nation to develop. As for now there are only few people that want to work for their future. The rest of them are idle and wait to be given what they need. I don't think that such hothouse conditions will do us any good. I think the nation is degrading which is worse than persecutions. One cannot always take without giving.

From the beginning of perestroika I was dreaming about a museum of Jewish history. I saw how people were throwing away their photographs, books and documents before leaving for Israel and other countries. I collected all I could find, sorted things out and kept them. As soon as the Association of Jewish Culture was founded I offered to establish a museum about the Jewish history of Chernovtsy.

I studied museum business and transferred my whole collection to the museum. We also asked people to give their historical belongings to the museum. Within half a year we finished and displayed our collection. There was an opening ceremony where I was referred to as the author of the idea and founder of the museum. We tell people about Jewish life in Chernovtsy before 1940,

how many synagogues were in town, Jewish everyday life, their traditions and religion and about the peaceful coexistence with people of other nationalities. We have ancient Torah scrolls , prayer books , tallits, chanukkiyahs, other Jewish ritual accessories and old family pictures that were miraculously saved during the Great Patriotic War. What's most important to me is that there is a museum and that I can continue my work.

I am also fond of tourism. I work as a part-time guide at a tourist agency. I do guided tours for foreigners. Chernovtsy is a very beautiful town. The Jewish neighborhood in the center of the town has preserved its original looks. I know every house in Chernovtsy, its history, architect and all its former owners. The museum and tourism are the two things I'll have for the rest of my life.

Glossary

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

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.

3 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.

4 Young Octobrist
In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

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

6 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.

7 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.

8 Twentieth Party Congress

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

9 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.