

# Irina Aizenberg

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Alexandr Tonkonogiy

Date of the interview: January 2003

Irina Aizenberg is an old, gray-haired, short woman. She is friendly and neat. She lives in a two-room apartment. She has furniture in this apartment bought in the 1960s. There is a sign of her loving care on everything in her apartment: the parquet floors gleam of polish, not a speck of dust anywhere and the shining crystal ware in the cupboard. Irina belongs to that category of women who can make any modest lodging a snug place. She lives alone. Her only son died tragically. Irina always waits for her grandson Victor's calls. He lives in Israel and tries to convince his grandmother to move there. Irina does all the housework herself.

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## **My family**

My paternal grandmother, Ethel Gurovich, was born in Kherson in 1877. I don't know her maiden name. I never met my grandmother and we had no photographs of her. My grandmother got education at home. In 1894 the family moved to the village of Matusov, Kiev region [today Matusov town, Cherkassy region] where my grandmother met my grandfather Israel.

My paternal grandfather, Israel Gurovich, was born in Matusovo in 1870. He studied at cheder. He spoke fluent Yiddish and knew prayers in Hebrew. My father told me that my grandfather was an estate manager in Matusov, but I don't know any details about it. My grandparents got married that same year they met. They both came from religious families and had a traditional wedding with a chuppah. Grandmother Ethel was a housewife. My grandparents had six children.

In 1912 my grandparents and their children moved to Odessa, but I don't know for what reason. They settled down in Meschanskaya Street and in 1923 they moved to a house in Bazarnaya Street in the center of the town. Their children and grandchildren also lived in this house. Their other three children were born there. Grandfather Israel was a very kind and nice man. He got up very early each morning to make the round of his children and grandchildren asking them if they needed his help.

In 1922, during a typhoid epidemic in Odessa, my grandmother fell ill and died. She was buried at the 1st Jewish cemetery. There was a Jewish funeral. After Grandmother Ethel died my grandfather remarried in approximately 1923. His second wife's name was Polia. From when I remember my grandfather – the middle of the 1930s – he worked as an electrician at the buttry. My grandfather was a self-educated man. He was very handy and could do many things.

On Jewish holidays the whole family got together at Grandfather Israel and my father's stepmother Polia's apartment. They taught us all rules to be followed to observe Jewish holidays accordingly. During seder at Pesach my cousins and I repeated traditional questions after Ms. Polia. We always ate matzah at Pesach. I don't know where they got it in those years. At Purim Ms. Polia made hamantashen with poppy seed filling and treated all children to those pies. She and Grandfather Israel went to synagogue on all holidays and fasted at Yom Kippur. Other members of the family didn't quite observe all rules. This is all I remember about their religiosity.

I remember the family gathering on my grandfather's 70th birthday in 1940. All his children and grandchildren came to greet him and it was a noisy and merry celebration. We all loved Grandfather dearly.

During the Great Patriotic War [1](#) Grandfather Israel and his second wife Polia evacuated to the village of Borovoye in Kokchetav region [2,400 km northeast of Odessa in Northern Kazakhstan]. All my grandfather's children and their families, but his older son Abram were in Borovoye. When Israel and Polia were on their way back home from evacuation in 1944 Grandfather had an infarction and there was nothing they could do to help him. Polia buried him in Nezhyn, Chernigov region. No Jewish traditions were observed at his funeral.

Grandfather Israel and Grandmother Ethel had nine children. All of them, but the three younger children, were born in Matusov village. My grandfather and his second wife Polia didn't have children of their own.

My father's older brother Abram was born in 1895. Uncle Abram lived in Odessa. He was an accountant. Uncle Abram had a Jewish wife. Her name was Ania. They had two children: daughter Inna and son Valeri. During the war they were in evacuation. I guess, they were in Tashkent. After Odessa was liberated Abram's family returned home. Uncle Abram's daughter graduated from Polytechnic College after the war and his son graduated from Moscow College of Steel and Alloys. They worked as engineers at plants in Odessa. Uncle Abram's wife Ania died in Odessa in 1955. Uncle Abram never remarried. He died in Odessa in 1983 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery. His son Valeri, his wife and their two children live in the US and Inna, her husband and daughter live in Odessa.

My father's second brother Efim was born in 1897. Uncle Efim lived in Kherson. He worked as an accountant. He was married to a Jewish woman. His wife's name was Asia. They had two sons. Efim died in Kherson in 1991 and his wife died in 1992. One of his sons lives in Israel and another one in St. Petersburg.

My father's third brother Yakov was born in 1899. I have no information about him, except that after the revolution [2](#) Yakov moved to America in 1918 and there was no more contact with him.

My father's older sister Sara was born in 1903. Aunt Sara lived in Odessa. She was married to a Jewish man. Her husband's name was Ilia Koltun. Aunt Sara was a housewife. They had three children: two daughters and a son, born shortly before the war in 1941. Aunt Sara and her children were in evacuation in Kazakhstan. After the war they returned to Odessa. Sara died in Odessa in 1964 and her husband died in Odessa in 1991.

Their older daughter Lora finished a musical college. She married a Georgian man. After finishing the college she got a job assignment [3](#) in Uzhhorod, Subcarpathia [4](#). She had two sons. Lora died in 1990s. Sara's second daughter Valia has a Jewish husband. They have two children. They live in the US, only Valia's younger son Volodia lives here, in Odessa.

My father's sister Fira was born in 1905. She had a secondary education and worked as a typist. She was married to a Jewish man. His name was Yasha Shpiekulant. They had a daughter. Her name was Lina. Uncle Yasha died in Odessa in 1976 and Aunt Fira died in 1998. Their daughter Lina lives in Germany.

My father's youngest brother Boris was born in 1912 after the family moved from Matusovo to Odessa. Boris finished a secondary school and a military college in Odessa. Before the Great Patriotic War he was an officer in the NKVD [5](#). During the Great Patriotic War he went to the front and perished in 1941. Boris was married. His wife's name was Riva. She was a Jew. They had a daughter, but after Boris perished we lost contact with his family and I have no information about his wife and daughter.

My father's younger sister Shura was born in Odessa in 1915. Aunt Shura finished a secondary school in Odessa and an accounting course. She was chief accountant on passenger ships on the Black Sea Fleet [6](#). She was married to a Jewish man named Misha Maslekh. Her husband died in Odessa in 1959. Her son Boris works in Gmilus Hesed [7](#). Aunt Shura lives in Odessa.

My father's youngest sister Nina was born in Odessa in 1917. She finished a secondary school and worked as a typist. She was married. Her husband's name was Grisha Konakhevich. Aunt Nina's husband died in 1957. They had two sons: one son is a scientist in the space medicine field. He lives in Moscow. Their other son graduated from the Conservatory in Odessa. He lives in St. Petersburg where he works as art director of the Lenconcert organization [central concert agency in St. Petersburg]. Aunt Nina lives in Odessa.

My father, Victor Gurovich, was born in Matusov, Cherkassy region, in 1907. He moved to Odessa with his parents in 1912. He finished seven years of a Russian secondary school and an accounting course. He worked as an accountant at the shoe factory. My father liked to tell me the story of his and my mother's acquaintance in a joking manner. He said that her landlady provided miserable meals to my mother: whenever he came on a visit she was having buckwheat and broth. My father used to say that he felt so sorry for my mother that he decided to marry her.

I know very little about my mother's parents. All I know is that my maternal grandfather, Isaac Maidannik, was born in Zhmerinka, Vinnitsa region, in 1882. Grandfather Isaac went to synagogue on Saturday and on Jewish holidays and observed all Jewish traditions. My aunt Rosa, my grandfather's older daughter, told me about it. My maternal grandmother, Eta Maidannik, whose maiden name I don't know, was born in the same town in 1882. My grandfather Isaac and grandmother Eta met in 1898. They got married in 1899. They were both 17 when they got

married.

My grandfather Isaac and grandmother Eta died from influenza within three days in 1917. They were both 35 years old. They were buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions in Zhmerinka. My aunt Rosa, who was 17 years old at the time, made all the arrangements for the funeral. She told us that there was the Kaddish recited at the cemetery.

My grandfather Isaac and grandmother Eta had four children. My mother's older sister Rosa was born in Zhmerinka in 1900. After her parents died she had to raise the younger children. The youngest boy was only three years old. Rosa married Isaac Krunker. He worked as a painter. He did the finishing of the railway station in Zhmerinka, known for its architectural design. Their only son finished Medical College in Kiev before the Great Patriotic War. During the war he was summoned to the front and perished in the first days. Rosa's husband Isaac also perished at the front.

Aunt Rosa was the only member of our family who knew Jewish traditions and observed some of them, for example the kashrut. She went to synagogue when the memorial prayer was recited at Yom Kippur. I remember, when we lived in Zhmerinka in 1944/45, Aunt Rosa lit candles on Friday evenings. Aunt Rosa died in Kiev in 1985.

My mother's second sister Polia was born in Zhmerinka in 1904. She finished seven years of secondary school in Zhmerinka and after she moved to Odessa she began to work as an attendant at a hospital. She was single. I don't know why she remained single since I always found her attractive. Before the war Polia finished a course for medical nurses. When the Great Patriotic War began Polia was mobilized to the army. She worked in a hospital at the front. She perished in 1942.

My mother's younger brother Leonid was born in Zhmerinka in 1914. He studied seven years at school and moved to Odessa in the late 1920s. I don't know how he made a career, but before the Great Patriotic War he was the director of a store in Odessa. Leonid was married. His wife's name was Lusya. She was a Jewish woman. They had three children, but I only knew the name of their son Izia. During the war their family was in evacuation in Kzyl-Orda [2,800 km from Odessa in Southern Kazakhstan]. After the war they lived in Kishinev, Moldova, where Uncle Leonid was the director of a store. Leonid died in Kishinev in 1970. His wife died in Kishinev in 1975. Their children reside in the US.

My mother Sara Maidannik was born in Zhmerinka, Vinnitsa region, in 1910. Her parents died when my mother was seven years old. My mother was raised by her older sister Rosa and her husband Isaac. My mother finished seven years at school in Zhmerinka and in 1925 she moved to Odessa where it was easier to find a job and get a profession. My mother went to work as a leather cutter at the shoe factory. She also studied at a 'fabzavuch' school. [Fabzavuch schools are factory or plant vocational schools.] My mother rented a room and also paid for her meals to the owner of the apartment. She met my future father at the factory.

My parents got married in 1927. They had a civil ceremony. My mother said they couldn't afford a wedding party. My father was against my mother's going to work after they got married. My mother quit work and became a housewife. My parents never told me in what apartment they lived before I was born. I think they either rented a room or lived with some of their relatives.

## Childhood

I, Irina, was born on 3rd January 1929, two years after my parents got married. My parents were not religious. We only spoke Russian in the family. My father was a member of the Communist Party. When he joined the Party or for what reason was never discussed in our family. Shortly after I was born my father went to work as an accountant at the Headquarters of Odessa Railroad.

In 1933, my father got an assignment to go to a village near Odessa to work on the improvement of agriculture. My mother and I followed him there. We had a small house and kept livestock in that village. We kept a pig and a German breed cow with black spots. It gave 22 liters of milk per day. We left some for the family and gave the rest to the sovkhos [8](#). My mother also kept geese, ducks and chickens, so we also had eggs. My parents told me that this livestock helped us to live through the period of famine in Ukraine in 1933 [9](#). My father worked as an accountant in the sovkhos and he also received food products for his work.

We moved back to Odessa in 1936. My mother was pregnant and this same year she gave birth to my younger brother Georgi. In Odessa my father continued working as an accountant at the railroad headquarters. We received two rooms in a big communal apartment [10](#) with many tenants. Our two rooms were located rather disadvantageously: we could only come to the kitchen through our neighbor's room. I don't think anyone else in Odessa experienced any similar discomfort.

We got along well with our co-tenants. There was a common kitchen, but we had a stove in our room that we stoked with sunflower seed husk that we purchased at the oil factory. There were special containers for seed husk in the stove. My younger brother's bed was near the stove and once it almost caught fire, but the baby-sitter didn't lose control and put down the fire quickly. The baby-sitter, a Ukrainian girl, came in the morning to look after my younger brother and help Mother with the housework. We did not observe the kashrut or any Jewish holidays in the family because my father was a member of the Communist Party.

In 1936 I went to Ukrainian school #118 [11](#) near the Privoz market [a big market in Odessa]. I studied in this school before the Great Patriotic War. That this was a Ukrainian school helped me to learn Ukrainian. Children and teachers were of various nationalities. We took no notice of anybody's nationality. I can remember one Jewish teacher. His last name was Urman. He taught the Russian literature. He was a brilliant teacher and schoolchildren liked him a lot.

I remember the ceremony of admission to pioneers [12](#) in the gym at school: unfortunately, my stocking slipped down and I was trying to fix it before anybody noticed it. It sounds funny now, but it was so serious when it happened. There were many clubs in our school. I liked singing and led the chorus at school. We sang pioneer and Komsomol [13](#) songs. We also had military training at school. We were trained to disassemble and assemble a rifle and put on gas masks.

I had many friends of various nationalities. We didn't bother about the subject of nationality in our family. I didn't face any anti-Semitism in Odessa. I remember little about arrests of 1937 [during the so-called Great Terror] [14](#) since I was only nine years old. I only remember that Aunt Sara's co-tenant in the communal apartment was arrested for unknown reasons, but that later she was rehabilitated [15](#).

## **During the war**

In spring 1941 my father got another job assignment: he was to take the position of chief accountant at the sovkhos called Peremoga in Razdelnaya district near Odessa. The director of this sovkhos was Nord, a German man. He became a friend of our family almost immediately after we moved to the village. In the morning of 22nd June 1941 we were sitting at his home and the radio constantly repeated: 'Listen to an important announcement at 12 o'clock.' Then the radio announced that a war with Germany had begun. The director of the sovkhos was taken away on that same day since he was German. My father received his summons to the front.

My mother, my brother Georgi and I moved to Odessa. When air raids in Odessa began in July 1941 we were evacuated by a special train for railroad employees. Our mother had little luggage with her believing that we were going to be back home soon. We went to Stalingrad and there was food on this train: tinned food and water for free. We didn't stay long in Stalingrad since the war reached there in a short while.

We moved to Engels, Saratov region, Russia, where my father's brother Efim evacuated with his family. When the front line came close to the town we all moved to the village of Borovoye in Kokchetav region in Northern Kazakhstan. There we shared one room with three families. Local residents had never seen Jews before. They used to say to us, 'Some Jews are coming - different from what we are like.' It did not have a negative meaning. They were friendly.

The climate in Northern Kazakhstan was very hard - the temperatures dropped to minus forty and a person didn't feel when he got frostbitten. People used to shout, 'Rub your cheeks and nose!' to one another in the streets when they saw pale white complexion. I suffered from such frosts. At first I wore galoshes since this was all I had available. I got my feet swollen in those boots and my mother bought me 41 size valenki boots at the market. I pulled them on, but then couldn't take them off and they had to be cut. Since then I've had rheumatism, heart problems and feet and hands sensitive to cold weather.

In summer 1942 my mother's younger brother Leonid took us to Kzyl-Orda [2,800 km from Odessa in Southern Kazakhstan] where he was in evacuation with his family. There were strong winds and oppressive heat in summer in Southern Kazakhstan, and there was sand biting on one's face and eyes. My uncle Leonid helped my mother to get a job at a baker's store in the town. I helped my mother to glue bread coupons to submit them to the accounting office. We received some bread coupons as well.

At first we stayed with Uncle Leonid in a two-room apartment, but since there was too little space, our mother rented a room. She went to work at the sulfur plant producing hydrate of sodium. Once someone left a valve on the hydrate of sodium pipe open. Perhaps, at first there was no hydrate of sodium coming from the pipe, but later it began leaking and somebody had to stop this. My mother ran to turn on the valve and got right into the jet of hydrate of sodium. She got a first grade burn and couldn't continue working. She had burns all over her.

We received a little money by my father's certificate, but it was too little. I went to work at the canteen at the railway station. I peeled potatoes and washed dishes. I received two luncheons; one for me and another for my mother. We shared this meal with my brother Georgi.

I don't remember whether there were many or few Jews in evacuation since we didn't really care about nationality. I didn't have close friends there, but I got along well with all people. We didn't

observe any Jewish holidays in our family in evacuation either. But I remember a distant relative who lived with us for some time – I don't remember his name – and who prayed constantly at home. I remember that my cousins, the children of Uncle Leonid, and I laughed at him. I still feel ashamed for such conduct. We found it funny since we didn't get the appropriate education.

We stayed in Kzyl-Orda until 1944. We needed an invitation letter to go back to Ukraine. There was nobody to sign such a letter in Odessa. Mother's sister Rosa sent us an invitation letter and we went to Zhmerinka where she resided then. We received an apartment with all comforts in an officer apartment house in Zhmerinka as a family of a front line officer. We kept in touch with Father by mail. My brother Georgi and I went to school. There were many officers' children in our school.

On 9th May 1945 [16](#) we heard an announcement about the capitulation of Germany on the radio. It happened late at night and I knocked on the doors of all other apartments to bring them the news since we were the only family who had a radio. There was a Party office next door to our apartment. There was a map where they marked the advance of our army with flags. On Victory Day our neighbor boys and I tore down this map and threw it outside feeling happy that the war was over at last.

I didn't know whether there were Jewish children at school or if there was a synagogue in Zhmerinka or any demonstration of the Jewish life. Later on it turned out that there was a Zionist organization in the town. I didn't even know what Zionism was about. Aunt Rosa told us that after we moved, some officers came asking for me to interrogate me about that organization.

## **Stay in Central Europe**

My father was financial officer of a division. The war ended for him in Vienna. He was in the rank of lieutenant colonel when the war ended. He was awarded an Order of the Red Star. In 1945 my father worked in the maintenance battalion at an aerodrome, 18 kilometers from Vienna. We joined him there. We went by train. We lived at this location from 1945 to 1947.

There was a Russian secondary school for officers' children in Vienna. I had finished the ninth and went to the tenth grade and my brother went to the fourth grade. My brother and I were driven to school. I got along well with my classmates. There was no issue of nationality at school. My mother arranged a big party on my 18th birthday. My classmates and teachers came to the party from Vienna. My friend Sasha was a daughter of the Soviet Consul in Austria.

My family didn't observe any Jewish holidays when we lived in Austria. Since we lived in the Soviet community I don't know anything about the Jewish life in Austrian towns. We were taken on tours in Vienna. I saw the ruins of the Opera Theater in Vienna. It was burnt down. I didn't take much interest in any places of interest in Vienna. I looked forward to going back to Odessa.

I visited the famous cemetery in Vienna where Strauss was buried. [Johann Strauss (1825–1899), famous Austrian composer, buried in Vienna's Zentralfriedhof] It was a tragic accident that brought me to the cemetery. My classmate's father died in a bus accident. He wanted to jump into a bus, but slipped and fell under its wheels. We went to his funeral. The casket was brought across the city. People lined along the streets raising their hands in the 'rot front' greeting [a fist of the right hand that German communists raised bent in the elbow as a traditional sign of solidarity.]

I was at a fancy dress ball in the palace of the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph [17](#). My father's division got an invitation there. I remember the beautiful palace, but regardless of all pleasure of living in Austria I was missing Odessa.

Then my father was transferred to a village near Budapest in Hungary. I don't remember its name. I admired the clean towns and villages in Austria and Hungary. We lived in the houses that had formerly belonged to German fascists. I remember one of them: there were two rooms, a kitchen and an attic in it. There was a laundry room in the basement and an orchard in the yard. There were many different fruit trees in it. There was also a small kitchen garden and all paths in the garden were asphalted. There was a lovely alley crossing the garden and a nice wooden pavilion at its end. Everything was well groomed.

### **After returning to Odessa**

In late 1947 my father was demobilized. We returned to Odessa. When we came back there I heard that one of my school friends, Bertha, and her family perished in the ghetto in Odessa. When we returned to Odessa we lived with my cousin Inna, Abram's daughter, and then with Aunt Nina, my father's younger sister. In 1948 we received a two-room apartment on the first floor in Kuznechnaya Street. There was a stove in the kitchen that was also used to heat the apartment.

My father went to work as an auditor and accountant at the railroad logistics office. Then he went to work as an accountant at the emergency office where he worked until 1966. My mother didn't go to work. We didn't observe any Jewish holidays at this period. I didn't hear people speaking Yiddish in the streets in Odessa. I knew that there was one synagogue after the war. Like everywhere else in the country there was a terrible lack of food in Odessa.

In 1948 I entered the College of Foreign Languages. This college later became the Department of Roman and German languages of Odessa University. The admission commission was very pleased with my conduct of German at the entrance exam. I studied English in college. I don't think Jews were having any problems with entering a college. There were not many Jewish students in the college. As for Jewish lecturers, I only remember Lourie, who taught Russian literature. I joined the Komsomol in college. I liked to study and I had many friends in college. We celebrated Soviet holidays and birthdays, went to parades and to the cinema.

In 1951 I married my distant relative Michael Aizenberg, who I met when we were in evacuation in Kzyl-Orda. My husband was born in Odessa in 1927. Michael's father, Shulem Aizenberg, was a very decent man. He went to the front on the first days of the Great Patriotic War. He was captured near Sevastopol. All captives lined up and fascists ordered, 'Commissars and Jews, step forward!' He was the first to step forward. He was shot. I don't know how my husband got to know these details of his father's death, but that's what Michael said about how his father died. Michael had a brother. His name was Yuri. Their mother Rosa ignored her children's needs when they were in evacuation. They were starving. She didn't go to work. After the war they returned to Odessa.

Michael finished an evening school and entered the Automechanic College in Odessa. After finishing this college he worked as an electrician at the Kozhzamenitel plant where he became the manager of a mechanic shop. Michael's family was not religious and he didn't observe any Jewish traditions. He was a member of the Communist Party.



We had a civil ceremony at the district registry office and had a wedding party where our families and relatives got together. We had a wedding party in my uncle Abram's apartment since my parents' apartment was very small. My husband and I lived with my parents at first.

In 1952 I finished the college with honors and got a job assignment at the Golaya Pristan district town in Kherson region. I was an English teacher at a local school. Golaya Pristan was a small town on the bank of the Dnieper tributary. It was a mud cure resort at that time. We rented a one-room apartment in a small house where our landlady resided, too. The school paid our monthly rental fee and provided coal to us.

We lived in Golaya Pristan for two years. Michael couldn't find a job and we decided to go back to Odessa. I couldn't find a teacher's job in Odessa. My father helped me to get a controller's job in the shoe factory. Then I got ill: there was something wrong with a joint in my right hand. After I recovered I went to work as an English teacher at the engineer training course at Technician House where I worked for nine years.

In 1952 I heard about the Doctors' Plot [18](#), but since I was raised as a patriot I believed that what the government said to be true. It would have never occurred to me that something could be wrong in the Soviet country. Stalin was my idol. When he died in 1953 I was in such sorrow that I even got some gray hair. Khrushchev's speech [19](#) was a discovery and actually a shock for me. Since that time I did not put all my trust into what Soviet newspapers published.

My brother Georgi finished his secondary school with honors in 1953. After finishing school he wanted to enter the Odessa Construction College, but he faced anti-Semitism there: the commission lowered his mark at an entrance exam. Our acquaintances told us that the rector of this college couldn't stand Jews. All our attempts to prove that Georgi was right failed. Georgi was so shocked by this injustice that he was on the verge of committing suicide.

However, he went to the preparatory training course at the Polytechnic College and after finishing this course he entered the Mechanic Faculty of this college that he finished with honors. Georgi was a design engineer at the special design office. He had innovative developments and patent certificates. He became manager of a big design office.

In 1961 Georgi married Dina, a Russian girl. She was an engineer in the same design office where my brother worked. My parents liked Dina and didn't have any objections to their marriage. In 1962 their daughter Nelia was born. Later they divorced. My brother's wife left my brother for the chief engineer of their design office. Their daughter lives in America now. Dina died of stomach cancer.

My brother remarried in 1973. His second wife Tatiana is also Russian. Their son Michael moved to the US in the late 1990s. Georgi and Tatiana live in Odessa. They are pensioners. The design office where my brother used to work was closed. Georgi works as a guard at a parking lot. He is very unhappy about not being able to find a job to his liking.

My son Sasha was born in 1955. He was a weak and sickly child. In his infancy he had all diseases one could imagine and stayed in all hospitals in the town. He had rheumatic heart disease and at times he couldn't even walk. My father loved Sasha dearly. He took him to kindergarten in the morning before he went to work. When Sasha turned seven years of age his health condition didn't allow him to walk to school. We bought him everything he needed and on 1st September we

carried him to school. We enviously watched other children walking to school with bouquets of flowers. Sasha studied at home. Schoolteachers came to teach him. Sasha wasn't that good at his studies. His disease took away much of his energy. After finishing the seventh grade in 1969 he entered the Automechanic Technical School.

In 1956 my husband and I received a room in a communal apartment in Havannaya Street in the very center of the town. It was a very small 14 square meter room, but I kept it always tidy and clean and our friends asked me how I managed to keep it so orderly. There was even a children's corner for Sasha in this room. My son had a desk, a bed and a sideboard. In 1960 we exchanged this room for a room in a communal apartment in Olgievskaya Street in the center of the town. This was a 42 square meter room, but it was very cold since there was stove heating in it. We divided this huge room into two and had gas heating installed. This is the apartment I still live in.

In 1964 I went to work at the Vorovskogo factory. The director of this factory and most of the shop managers were Jews. I was senior engineer dispatcher. To get this position I finished a special mechanization of records course. It was hard work and I worked in shifts. It included seven night shifts per month. In 1966 my father died of cancer of his urinary bladder. He was 58. He was buried in the town cemetery. My mother went to work after he died. In 1970 I divorced my husband after living together for 19 years. He left me for another woman.

When Jews began to move to Israel in the 1970s I was surprised and annoyed since I was raised to believe in different things. Even my boss, who used to tell us at political classes that everything would be fine in this country, left. I was chief of a department at that period and I couldn't even see my relatives off to the airport since I was afraid that people would blame me for this. However, they understood me and didn't blame me for this. I am still in contact with them.

In 1972 my son finished his technical school and went to work at the Kozhzamenitel plant. Sasha was promoted to the position of foreman at a shop. He worked in shifts. In 1973 Sasha went to the army. He had three or four medical check-ups in hospital, but was proved to be fit for military service. In three months he suffered from an acute attack of rheumatic heart disease and was taken to hospital. My brother went to Zagorsk, met with Sasha's managers and repaid them for paying attention to Sasha's problems. Sasha was released from the army after several weeks in hospital. He returned to Odessa and got married in a month.

He married Ludmila Safronova, a Russian girl. She was only 17 when they got married. In 1974 their son Victor was born. Ludmila entered a medical school and finished it. Her parents and I helped her to raise their boy. After the wedding the newlyweds lived with me. Then they moved to Ludmila parents' three-room apartment. Shortly afterward Sasha and Ludmila decided to divorce. Ludmila remarried in 1985. She lives in Germany with her second husband now.

I retired in 1984. I continued to do some work though, until our office closed down due to lack of financing. I worked as a packing operator in a shop. When construction of a new factory building was completed I quit my job since it was too far away from where I lived. Then I went to work as an operator at the Scientific Research Communications Institute. I worked there for four years and then was dismissed when I turned 65. I haven't worked ever since.

In 1985 my son was murdered. Once in summer he showed up neither at home, nor at his ex-wife's home. Sasha had a Zaporozhets car and I thought there was something wrong with the car. I called

traffic police and they told me that he had left his car on the outskirts of the town and disappeared. Sasha's body was found in seven days on the grass. He was murdered in his car and then dropped beside the road.

His murderers were found and they confessed, but still the motives of this crime are unclear. One of them was sentenced to death and the others were sentenced to various terms in prison. The prosecutor said in court that one of Sasha's murderers wrote in a letter that the court had got 'I have no regrets about killing this zhydovskaya morda' [a Jewish mug]. One zhyd [abusive word for a Jew] less in this world.' At the funeral Sasha's doctor approached me at the cemetery. She said, 'We took so much effort to help him grow and after all we see such a tragic death.'

In 1987 my ex-husband died of cancer at the age of 60. He grieved after our son and this grief had a negative impact on his health condition. Michael was buried in the international town cemetery. I was at his funeral. His colleagues expressed their condolences to me.

In 1989 my grandson Victor finished school and entered the Automechanic Technical School and finished it. He also got a driver's license and became a driver. In 1994 my grandson moved to Israel. He lives in a town near Netanya with the family of Yuri, my husband Michael's brother. Yuri loves Victor dearly and treats him like his own son. Victor works as a driver for the director of a firm. Victor wanted me to go with him. He said, 'Granny, just imagine - I shall be alone there and you will be alone here. I'll worry about you.' I refused. He calls me and asks, 'Will you change your mind? Will you?' I am so worried about my grandson. The situation is so worrying in Israel. I wish there was peace in the country.

In the late 1980s my mother became sickly. She had a disease of the blood vessel in her cerebrum. I made some arrangements at work to be able to work half a day to spend another half day with my mother. My nephew Michael helped me to look after my mother. Mother always tried to get up from her bed and fell down. I couldn't lift her to put her back on the bed. I had to ask my neighbors to help me. Mother died in 1990. She was buried at the international cemetery beside my father's grave.

In the 1990s the Jewish life began to revive in Odessa. There are two synagogues in Odessa now. There is a Jewish charity center, Gmilus Hesed, a kosher butchery and a kosher store. There is one of these so-called 'warm houses' funded by Gmilus Hesed near my house. It's an apartment. The owner of the apartment opens its door to guests during meetings or on holidays, cooks food from products that Gmilus Hesed provides.

I went there on Jewish holidays. Older people get together there to spend time. I was there to observe Sabbath some time. I met interesting people there. Now this 'warm house' is far from my house, because it moved. I cannot walk that far and they send a volunteer from Gmilus Hesed to drive me there on Jewish holidays: Rosh Hashanah and Pesach. My relative Boris Maslekh always buys matzah for me at the synagogue. Gmilus Hesed also delivers a kilo of matzah for Pesach. Thanks to this I feel more Jewish than I did when I was young.

## Glossary

## **1 Great Patriotic War**

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

## **2 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

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

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

## **4 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)**

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

## **5 NKVD**

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the

political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

## **6 Black Sea Fleet**

A constituent part of the Russian Navy, it was founded in 1783 and took part in the Russian-Turkish wars in the 19th century. It played a very important role in World War I: over 180 various battleships pertained to it. They bombarded the coastal fortifications of the Central Power, such as Varna and the Bosphorus. In 1905 there were riots in battleship 'Potyomkin' and cruiser 'Chakov', which impacted Russian history further. Navy men not satisfied with the tsarist regime supported the Revolution of 1917 extensively. During World War II the navy took part in the defense of Sevastopol, Odessa, the northern Caucasus, Novorossiysk, the liberation of the Crimea, Nikolayev, Odessa and took part in the Iasi and Kishinev operations. After the war the Black Sea Fleet made enormous technical advance and complied with all international standards. The arsenal consisted of the most powerful carrier decks, nuclear war heads etc. After the break up of the Soviet Union (1991) Russia and the Ukraine commenced negotiations on the division of the Fleet and finally in 1995 a treaty was signed. As a result the larger part of the fleet was taken by Russia because the Ukraine was not willing to possess nuclear armament after 1991. At present both the Russian and the Ukrainian fleet are based in Sevastopol (on Ukrainian territory). According to the treaty the Russian navy is leasing the port until 2017; the Russian fleet is gradually being moved to Novorossiysk (port on Russian territory).

## **7 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

## **8 Sovkhoz**

State-run agricultural enterprise. The first sovkhoz yards were created in the USSR in 1918.

According to the law the sovkhos property was owned by the state, but it was assigned to the sovkhos which handled it based on the right of business maintenance.

## **9 Famine in Ukraine**

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

## **10 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.

## **11 School #**

Schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical.

## **12 All-Union pioneer organization**

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girls Scouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

## **13 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

## **14 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.

### **15 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

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

### **16 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

### **17 Francis Joseph I Habsburg (1830-1916)**

Emperor of Austria from 1848, king of Hungary from 1867. In 1848 he suppressed a revolution in Austria (the 'Springtime of the Peoples'), whereupon he abolished the constitution and political concessions. His foreign policy defeats - the loss of Italy in 1859, loss of influences in the German lands, separatism in Hungary, defeat in war against the Prussians in 1866 - and the dire condition of the state finances convinced him that reforms were vital. In 1867 the country was reformed as a federation of two states: the Austrian empire and the Hungarian kingdom, united by a personal union in the person of Franz Joseph. A constitutional parliamentary system was also adopted, which guaranteed the various countries within the state (including Galicia, an area now largely in southern Poland) a considerable measure of internal autonomy. In the area of foreign policy, Franz Joseph united Austria-Hungary with Germany by a treaty signed in 1879, which became the basis for the Triple Alliance. The conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the spark that ignited World War I. Subsequent generations remembered the second part of Franz Joseph's rule as a period of stabilization and prosperity.

### **18 Doctors' Plot**

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

Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **19 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.