

Ella Lukatskaya

[My family background](#)

[Before the war](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family background

I was born in 1938 in Kiev. My name Ella goes back to the history of our family. Three boys and one girl (it was me) in my mother's family were named Eleh. We were named after our grandfather Eleh Shaevich Smertenko that died during a pogrom in Kiev in 1905. Our family lived in Yurkovskaya street, Podol¹, Kiev. We lived in an apartment house located in the area that was flooded each year. The population of this neighborhood used to say that they had three misfortunes: pogroms, fire and floods. In those years (1905-10) all these 3 disasters used to happen frequently. But the most frequent were probably pogroms. Most frequently the pogroms were instigated by local Ukrainians living in Podol. But sometimes they were initiated by bandits from other locations. The most ruthless was "Chornaya Sotnia" (sotnia - a militarized unit, consisting of 100 military). My grandfather was killed during one of the pogroms, instigated by this Black hundred gang. On hearing the rattle of a nearing pogrom the tenants went to hide on the attic of the building. My grandmother Haya-Itta was holding my mother, the one year old Shendl. The baby got scared and started crying. The other tenants forced them to leave the attic. They went downstairs and my grandfather went with them, of course. When the thugs broke into the house my grandfather shielding my grandmother and the baby was the first one that they saw. The fatal blow reached my grandfather and he died on the same day. My grandmother and my mother survived. My grandfather was the only breadwinner in the family. He was a shoemaker and worked in a shop.



My grandmother Haya-Ita never accepted the revolutionary changes and the non-Jewish way of life that was forced on the people. She only received primary Jewish education. When her husband died she had to take care of her many children. She was trying to earn some money for her family. She was delivering goods to the people's homes trying to earn anything she could. She was doing her best to raise her children out of poverty. My mother said that my grandmother was a very wise woman. All kinds of people were seeking her advice because my grandmother was known for her wisdom and kindness. She could always advise how to save some money or how to cook dinner for the whole family from the minimum products. She could also give some advice on how to get along in the family or a number of housekeeping tips. She also knew how to keep other people's secrets and was highly respected for this. Besides my mother my grandparents had 9 other children. My

mother Shendl was their 10th child. My uncle Max, the oldest of all children was 20 years older than my mother. After my grandfather perished the family had no means of existence. They decided to send my mother and two other children to an orphanage to save them from starvation. My grandmother sold my grandfather's little shoemaking shop. She had to live on and provide food to her children. But still two twins that were a little older than my mother starved to death. My mother and her brother and sister happened to get into a founding house in Podol, supported by the synagogue. My mother lived there for almost 6 years. It was a small house, she told me. This house gave shelter to little boys and girls. They were living separately, and the synagogue acolytes' wives were taking care of them. The children received traditional Jewish education there, but my mother told me she didn't feel quite at home at this place.

Max, my mother's older brother, grew up and went to work. Life became easier and my grandmother could take the children home from the founding house. My mother went to school at the synagogue and studied three years there. My mother's mother tongue was Yiddish, but my mother knew Hebrew (she could read and write) and she had had an introductory course for Torah. In 1914 she had to terminate her studies, due to WWI. My mother's older brother was recruited to the front and again the family was left without any means of existence. Almost all children, including my mother (she was 10 years old) went to work. My mother went to the garment factory. This was the beginning of my mother's work experience and a turning point in her life. She changed her environment from Jewish to the working proletariat. In 3 years time she developed strong revolutionary and atheist ideas. Not to mention that, her family was religious: her parents went to the synagogue, prayed, observed rituals and traditions, performed kashrut, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

My mother believed that the revolution was liberation from poverty and fear for being Jewish. She strongly believed that there would never be any pogroms and that all people would be well off and happy. She was absorbed by the revolution. In the 1920s she became one of the first Komsomol² members in Kiev. She was a member of the Komsomol unit of Ratmanskiy. He was a famous revolutionary and a Jew. He was killed by a bandit later. My mother switched to Russian when she was 13-14 years old (then all around spoke in Russian, her it is necessary was communicate and it by leaps and bounds has learned Russian). When she was an apprentice at the factory she was trying to make speeches, and they were in Russian, of course. Since then she spoke Russian. She only spoke Yiddish with her mother Ita until January 1941 when my grandmother died.

I know very little about the life of my grandmother's children. There were two other girls after Max, the oldest boy. The name of one of the girls was Hanna, and I don't know the name of the other girl. They left for Palestine in 1912-14. We've never heard from them since then. Rosa, another sister of my mother, her favorite sister, died in Kiev in 1918 from Spanish smallpox. We have pictures of her two brothers Semyon (Shymon) born in 1885 (he perished during the civil war) and Shmuel, born in 1900. We were in the closest touch with my mother's older brother and my Uncle Max Smertenko until he died in 1967. We were also in touch with his family. Uncle Max had two sons: the older one was Ilia (Eleh) and the younger one was Semyon.

Semyon lived in Kiev. He had a higher education and was an engineer. His children (a son and a daughter) are in the United States and two other children (a son and a daughter) are in Israel now. Three children of my cousin Ilia (Max' son) live in Germany, Russia and Kiev. We are still in close contact with these relatives of ours.

It happened so that the family of my Uncle Max is our only relation and we are very happy to be in contact with them. Such family ties were of great importance in the 1920s of the previous century. My grandmother and my mother were living in a small room in an apartment in Gorky street. My mother was a Komsomol activist and worked at the garment factory. She worked a lot but earned very little. My grandmother had occasional earnings and they lived a very poor life. Some time in 1926 my mother was sent to study at the Communist Institute. She was a member of the Communist Party already. This Institute admitted young people that could just read and write and prepared political officers. It gave little education but much Communist ideology.

In 1928 my mother met her future husband and my father Aizik Iosifovich Lukatskiy. He was one year younger than my mother. He came to Kiev from a small Jewish town of Smela in the vicinity of Cherkassy. His friends told my mother that he was a great patriot of his town. He used to say that it was the best place in the world, although he had a difficult childhood.

Actually his whole family died during one of the pogroms in 1905-10. Only his cousins stayed alive. Little Aizek went to the founding home at the synagogue in Smela. He grew an orphan. He finished primary Jewish school there. My mother said that he knew Hebrew well and that he read Torah, but this education didn't last in his life. The revolution turned him into a convinced Communist, atheist and internationalist. He finished the Communist Institute like my mother and became a professional Communist party officer. Later he somehow learned a profession of radio operator and cryptographer.

We didn't know anything about his relatives, and in 1947 his cousin Eva Lvovna Lukatskaya found us all of a sudden. She was living with her daughter Shurochka in Moscow. Eva has died and Shurochka Lukatskaya lives in Germany now.

Before the war

So, two Jewish children – my mother and my father – met in the Communist Institute in Kiev and got married in 1931. There was no wedding, of course. They lived in a small room in Gorky street sharing this room with my grandmother. In 1932 their first baby was born. Her name was Maria, Murochka. They spoke Yiddish in the family. My mother and my grandmother spoke Yiddish and so did my father. My older sister Mura must have said her first words in Yiddish, too. He then forgot it. When I was born in 6 years I didn't hear any Yiddish and I didn't know it.

Between her getting married in 1931 and my birth in 1936 my mother was a Party activist. She became a member of the Communist Party in 1924 after Lenin died. It was the so-called Lenin's call up to join the Party. My mother told me that during this period she was singing revolutionary hymns in the choir of Komsomol members, giving concerts in the Philharmonic in Kiev. By the way, she also sang Russian and Ukrainian songs in this choir. They also sang Jewish songs in Yiddish. I remember some tunes of these songs that I heard when a child. My mother had a beautiful voice.

My father was working in the secret Department 1 of the Logistics Ministry. My mother told me that they were involved in grain storing up during the years of famine (1932-33) that was a risky activity. He was subject to numerous attacks in the country. Later he was involved in strategic food storage in Kiev. My mother, full of revolutionary ideas, also participated in this grain storing up that resulted in the famine of 1932-33. She left my older sister in my grandmother's care and exposed herself to the fatal danger. The starving farmers brought to despair attempted to kill her, too,

several times. Two years before I was born she was on one of these so-called business trips. She was on the 6th or 7th month of pregnancy, when some farmers beat her ruthlessly for taking away their last little bits of bread on behalf of the Soviet power, making their children starve to death³. She survived then, but her twins that she was pregnant with did not. My mother finally left this job and went to work as seamstress at a factory in Kiev. I was born in 1938. My birth and the fact that my mother left her Party work and the political arena rescued my mother from the repression of 1936-38. The majority of her Party colleagues were exterminated during those years. This repression touched our family as well. Few of my Uncle Max's cousins living in Kharkov were arrested along with their wives and families. They lost their children. The children were sent to orphanages and disappeared there. Nobody ever found them. My mother's thoughts about the repression were hard, but she remained a convinced Communist and she believed that everything in this country was done for the good of the people. She stayed faithful to the Communist ideas until her death in 1982. She never accepted the public denunciation of the cult of Stalin.

In 1930s only four of my grandmother's 10 children stayed alive. Grandmother lived in Kiev with two of them: her son Max and my mother. All of us lived in one room. My grandmother helped my mother about the house. She died before WWII. She rescued our life by dying. If she had lived longer we wouldn't have been able to evacuate during the war (my grandmother couldn't be moved) and would have stayed in Kiev ending in the Babiy Yar most evidently.⁴ Before end of life, she went to the synagogue, prayed, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

So, I was born in 1938. I was a 2nd child. There were five of us living in that small room in Gorky street: 2 children, my mother and father and our elderly grandmother Haya-Ita. I can hardly remember her. I have pictures of her, though.

There were five other families in the apartment where we lived. Two of them were Jewish families and the other tenants were Russian. I know these details from the stories that I was told later. I have only 3 memories from the period before the war. Number one is how my father used to toss me up near the open window of our room and I was trying to reach and touch a leaf of the chestnut tree branch, hanging into our window from above. I had a sensation of happiness.

During the war

My 2nd memory is of the wartime. I am a small 3-year-old girl, and I'm taken to the kindergarten. And then we are caught on the corner of the street by the sound of the banshee. Its strident sound was so traumatic that I still cannot bear even the honking of the passing cars. And my third memory is of the bombing when we were on a barge evacuating from Kiev in July 1941. I saw the boat sailing ahead of us bombed and drowned. The sight of it followed me for a long time.

My father was mobilized to the army from the first days of the war. He came to say good-bye to us on the bank of the Dnieper River. I was screaming and crying. I loved my father dearly and I must have had an inkling that he was leaving forever. My mother told me that when she fell asleep on the first night on the barge I got out of the bilge and almost fell into the water. My mother caught me at the last moment. I was crying and screaming that I wanted to go to my Daddy.

There were 3 of us going to the evacuation: my mother, my 7 year old sister Mura and I that had just reached three. My mother told me that before the evacuation she and my father made a fire in the stove to burn all our photographs and documents. I crawled to them and took out a small

package with photographs from the pile and put it into the pillowcase of my little pillow. Later they put this pillow into one of the suitcases and we left. Half a year passed until my mother noticed that there was something hard in my pillow and she found this package with photographs and my father's scarf. They are our only pre-war pictures.

I would also like to mention that my mother found some room in these two suitcases to put two children's books of fairy-tales with bright pictures for her small children.

We traveled on the barge down the Dnipro river to Dnepropetrovsk, and from there we went to the town of Mozdok at the Caucasus. We lived there for a year when my mother was notified that my father was missing. He was a radio operator and in 1941 he stayed on the occupied territory. In other words, he was working in the underground and he perished at the end of 1941. This may have happened in Darnitsa camp for prisoners of war. My father looked a typical Jew. Besides, he was circumcised when a child. I think that if he had been captured by the Germans he would have had no chance to survive. In 1941 my mother received the notification that he had been missing. And only ten years later we got to know some details of his death.

On the way to Mozdok I got ill and we had to get off the train. Later we heard that this train was bombed killing everybody that was there. We had to evacuate from Mozdok, but my mother was late for the last train. She was desperate, but later there came another train. And that previous one was also destroyed by bombing and nobody survived. My mother used to say that God was protecting us during our trip.

I remember one cold night in the steppe in Turkmenia. There were 10 Russian families. We were travelling on the donkey driven wagons. We arrived at the collective farm where they were growing cotton. It was almost a desert. There were 10 clay-walled huts with no windows, only a door. Each family received a hut that could fit 4-5 people lying on the floor. There was no furniture, no chairs or tables. We had two suitcases that served us as furniture. Later we made clay floors from goat dung and saxaul remainder to make our dwelling a little warmer. It was hot during the daytime and very cold at night. We lived in this climate for 3 years. Our colony consisted of ten families. Each family had two or more children. There were no men among us. There were only women and children and I was the youngest. The Turkmenians lived in their aul and didn't treat us well. Or, to put it mildly, they treated us badly.

Although I was the youngest I learned to understand them and speak a little. They treated my mother and me a little bit better and even sold us pumpkins and some food at the beginning. But after they found out that my mother was sharing this food with other tenants, they quit selling us food. Our food was what whatever little we got from the collective farm. We didn't get any bread, and our food was carrots. Early in the morning our mother went to the fields and we, children, remained by ourselves without any food or anybody to take care of us. There even was a vinary in that Turkmenian village, but I never tried any grapes while we were in the evacuation. When the cotton plants were blooming we were all allergic to its blossom. My mother's food ration was a little bit bigger, because she got some additional food for my father that had perished at the front. My mother divided this food to give to all children at our settlement. Once in these 3 years my mother received some candy. She put it in the small suitcase and was giving them to the children that were sick to ease their coughing. My sister and I never got ill and, therefore, never tried any candy.

There were no Jewish families in the evacuation. Therefore, Russian families treated us as Russians, and the Turmenians treated everybody that was not Turkmenian badly. I think one of the reasons why they didn't like us was that they identified us as communists – invaders and oppressors. Middle Asia never accepted the Soviet power.

After the war

I can remember very little of this Turkmenian aul. I remember the sand and snakes. Many of them were poisonous snakes, especially dangerous for us, children. I also remember a small mill that was put into motion by a donkey. They blindfolded this little donkey and he was going in circles all day round. The mill was grinding flour, but it was for the Turkmenians. But it was not the cold or the heat or lack of food that was hard to bear. It was separation from the outer world. We didn't have a radio. The news was brought by a courier that was bringing food every second week. When my mother heard from him that Kiev was liberated in 1943 she took each and every effort to return home. In early spring 1944 we were standing at the Kiev railway station. We put our luggage consisting of 2 suitcases on the cart and went home on foot. We were going nowhere, as we didn't know whether our house was there or not. It was there by miracle. All houses around it were destroyed. Or room was occupied by some other people. We lived in the kitchen for a whole month until we got the right to move into our room through the court. Our room was empty. Our next door neighbor was a Russian family and they took away our possessions during the war. My mother went to court and managed to get back her sawing machine. The neighbors threatened my mother to kill her and her children, and my mother was scared. But this was the only way out. We wouldn't have survived if it hadn't been for the sawing machine. My mother went to the market to buy old shabby clothes. She altered and patched them and sold them at the market. This was her only earning until she got a job at the garent factory. One Jewish family living in our house before the war went to the Babiy Yar. Another Jewish family returned after the war but they were living at a different place. We were the only Jewish family left in this house. I can't say that were treated well. I never heard any Yiddish, only when my mother was humming a lullaby in our room.

2 older women lived in the room that previously belonged to one of the Jewish families. They were orthodox believers and they rather liked me. They allowed me to borrow books from their book collection. My mother saw that they had some belongings of that Jewish family that went to the Babiy Yar but she was ignoring this fact due to their good attitude. They told me about the Orthodox belief and holidays and I learned about the orthodox religion long before I learned things about the Jewish way of life.

The postwar outburst of anti-Semitism didn't touch upon me. I went to the kindergarten. It was half-Jewish. Jewish kindergarten's then in the Kiev already was not, they all long ago were locked Soviet powers. Taught us in Russian, but was much teachers of Jews and Jewish parents tried to return their own children in this kindergarten. Certainly, us nothing did not tell on Jewish traditions and religions (this was forbidden), but there to us all much well pertained. There were many Jewish children in Kiev. We learned much from our tutor Sophia Naumovna – she was Jewish, she illegal tried to tell us on our Jewish origin. I was in the 2nd form at school when I was called “zhydovka”. About 70% of my classmates were Jewish. My 1st teacher Sophia Alexandrovna Baitalskaya was also a Jew. She was a wonderful teacher. But there was a senior pupil. He had a bicycle and he said that he wouldn't give it a “Zhydovka” for a ride. I was very hurt. I came home with tears in my eyes and asked my mother what it meant. And she told me for the first time about the Jewish people and

why they were persecuted. My mother also told me that anti-Semitism was introduced by the Germans and that communists didn't have and that even before the communists there wasn't any anti-Semitism. She also told me about the Babiy Yar and about our neighbors that were exterminated there. She was convincing me that a real communists could never be anti-Semitic and she told me that I shouldn't be ashamed of my Jewish nationality. I have never been ashamed of it or concealed my origin. I learned then to stand for my dignity.

Things were more complicated with my older sister Maria, Mura. She was a fighter like me. She studied well at school and at a technical school later. She was a quiet and humble girl. But her appearance was typical Jewish and everywhere and everybody never missed a chance to call her a "zhidovka". She couldn't fight back or respond. As a result she withdrew into herself and this had an impact on her whole life.

1952 was the year of public accusation of the Kremlin Jewish doctors of murder of their patients, the so-called "doctors' case"⁵. I felt it on my skin, so to say. I got into a hospital with appendicitis. I was 13. Adults and children didn't like me. They were hurting me both physically and psychologically. I fainted when the doctors were removing stitches after the surgery. Almost nobody talked to me. They told my mother nasty things about me. When I returned home the situation there was one of concern. The family of my uncle Max and his friends were preparing for deportation to nobody knew where. They said we were going to be moved either to Brobidjan or to Siberia. People were expecting pogroms. I realized then that it might be very fearful to be a Jew.

My sister Maria was taking it very hard. My mother was afraid that she might have committed suicide. My sister told me then that life was impossible when one expects some trouble or a blow at any moment.

In 1953 my mother was Head of a shop at the factory. Our life improved a little. My sister was finishing Financial Institute at that time. She was an excellent student. We didn't have many relatives. It was Uncle Max and his family. Fortunately, they lived in Kiev, too. My mother and Uncle Max were taking every possible effort to find out what happened to my mother's cousins Khrakovskiye but they failed at that time. I met them in 1955 after their exculpation.

My mother and I didn't get along well. When I was 8 I actually broke her engagement. It wasn't because I didn't like this man. I just loved my father dearly and couldn't imagine anybody to take his place. A year before, in 1948, I fainted from hunger. I was sent to the recreation home to improve my condition. There was a nurse there that offered my mother to adopt me. Her own children passed away during the war. This Russian woman was ready to adopt me as her daughter, she was no difference, who I in nature. At first my mother was almost ready to give me away. Two children were too much for her and she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to provide enough food for us to survive. I moved in with this woman. Regretfully, I can't remember her name. She was very good to me. I lived there for almost a month, but I cried all the time and begged my mother to take me back. My mother took me back. She said "we will starve, but starve together". But I had the feeling of being hurt since that time. Later I realized that that I was unfair, because she managed to bring up the feeling of dignity in her children and raise them as fighters with circumstances. I didn't suffer from lack of food at school as much as I did from my poor clothes. Before the end of school my only dress was a cotton uniform. The first dress my mother made me was my prom dress.

I have dim memories from my childhood, from 1950s, of some talks about Palestine and a new state of Israel, our historic Motherland that people were moving there and that life was going to be better in this country. But this had nothing to do with us. It never occurred to our communist mother that we might live anywhere else besides the Soviet reality. She was raising us 100% Soviet people.

Stalin's death in 1953 was a terrible woe for our mother. She never accepted the following denunciation of him. We were also in grief, so big that I even fell ill. I had fever and fits. It seemed life was impossible without Stalin.

Some time in 1956 our relatives from Kharkov arrived after exculpation. Even this fact or whatever little they told us what had happened to them did not change our opinion. My mother felt very sorry for our relatives. Aunt Genia never found her children, but somehow these processes were going on as if in parallel and independently. My Uncle Max was of different opinion. My mother called him a "contra" (one who was against the Soviet power). He called my mother a "little Komsomol girl". However, they loved each other tenderly. I heard about Hanukkah from Max when I was 14. He wasn't religious, but he knew Jewish history and traditions. These were abstract things for me. I was a Komsomol activist at school and secretary of the Komsomol unit and finished school with a gold medal.

I finished school in 1955. I was fond of radio engineering and wanted to enter the Polytechnic Institute. But people explained to me that its doors were closed for me as a Jew. A column "beginning" was in the Soviet passport. To deliver the documents for the arrival needed was bring a passport. If in this passport was written "Jew", such person nowhere took – this was state policy in 1960s. So I decided to enter the Institute of Light Industry. I submitted my documents and passed the interview successfully. (Students with a gold medal didn't have to take any exams, only an interview to higher educational institutions). So, I was sure that I was admitted. But in two months' time they made me take an exam in Mathematics. I was good at Mathematics and when I got a "2" (the lowest grade) I couldn't understand what happened. They did not want to take I learn therefore that I - a Jew, and so have putted me an evaluation "2", though I correctly has answered all questions. For a whole year I couldn't find a job. Finally, I got a job at the shop of ready radio units. My responsibility was gluing things. The following year I submitted my documents to the extramural department at the Polytechnic Institute. And again I was refused. Only interference of Koval, Minister of Education, that was a relative of our neighbors helped me to be admitted to the extramural radio engineering department. I was the only Jew at this department. I graduated this Institute with the so-called "red" diploma (issued to the most distinguished students).

My hardships were similar to my sister's. Upon finishing technical school she managed to enter the Financial Institute. She was sent to work in Kishyniov. But my mother wanted my sister to be in Kiev. My mother demanded her to come to Kiev. My sister returned but she never found herself either in the financial circles or in her personal life. Her Jewish identity was an obstacle everywhere. My sister was not sociable. She got married when she was about 30 but got divorced soon. In the early 1990s Maria moved to Israel, hoping that we would follow her. She lives in Hadera with no relatives or close people around. She does not work, lives on the pension, which gets from the state.

In 1962 I finished the Polytechnic Institute. At that time I was working at the tape recorder development laboratory. I was one of the authors of the “Dnepr-12” tape recorder, a famous tape recorder in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. In 1963 the radio factory became a military enterprise. This meant that all employees had to obtain the KGB (State Security Committee) permit. In KGB they told me that I could be proud of my father and that he died as a hero. During my studies and afterwards I was offered to join the Communist Party. But I became a different person then. I realized that people were joining the Communist Party for easier promotions and privileges. I was against the Communist Party and so was my sister. We didn’t want to hurt our mother and never argued with her, but we had a firm opinion, chosen by us once and forever.

In 1952 I got married. My husband Daniil Itskovich Narovlianskiy was a student of the Kiev Institute of Communications. His family was a patriarchal Jewish family with clear anti-Soviet spirits. I heard for the first time “The Voice of America” and “The Voice of Israel” in their family. Their broadcasts were jammed by the Soviet radars, but sometimes at night it was possible to hear some news from the free world. They were telling the truth about the Soviet power, anti-Semitism, prison camps for political prisoners, suppression of human rights. They were telling us all about what we were not supposed to know. In my husband’s family I came to know the Jewish holidays and traditions. They had matsa for holidays, went to the synagogue, celebrated Hanukkah, and fasted at Yom Kippur. They didn’t follow the kashrut. It was impossible during the Soviet regime and total poverty. My mother-in-law was a housewife and cooked Jewish stew with prunes, stuffed fish and Jewish strudel with cherry jam and nuts. My husband had an older sister. They all lived in one room. After the wedding we lived with my mother. We didn’t have a wedding, just a dinner at my home. We had four neighbors in our apartment, and the four of us (my mother, my sister, my husband and I) were sharing one room. We lived so for 2 years. We rarely visited my husband’s parents. Although we had many relatives we didn’t have any family gatherings.

In 1963 our son Alik was born. There wasn’t any space for a baby’s bed in our room. The 3 of us were sleeping on the sofa, our only furniture. In a year’s time we received a small one-room apartment. By that time I had left my job. I had to take care of my baby. I got a job of Head of Language Laboratory at the military Communications College. I sank into the wave of anti-Semitism at this college. They suggested that I changed my father’s name, but I demonstratively kept it. Even at the highest level meetings people could tell anti-Semitic anecdotes, nodding at me “Ellochka Aizikovna, it doesn’t have anything to do with you, you are a rare exception”.

In 1973 our daughter Marina was born. We lived in this one-room apartment for eight years until our son Alik left. Even in the 1970s we were thinking about emigration to Israel, but my mother was an insuperable obstacle. She couldn’t even hear about “betraying” the best country in the world, and we couldn’t leave her behind. My mother remained a convinced Communist until she died in 1982. She would have never left this country, although she sympathized with those who left for Israel. I still feel resentment towards my mother’s fanaticism. I am different from her, because my children’s interests and desires always prevail.

The school teacher of our son Alik hated Jews. She hated us so much that she removed the documents from the file of the children that were awarded a trip to Czechoslovakia for successes in their studies (an exceptional thing for that time) and sent another boy into this trip. When Alik was in the 8th form she told me that he should quit school, as there was no hope for him to go to an Institute due to his Jewish nationality. But our son is a fighter. His father was teaching him to be a

fighter. His father went in for wrestling and was teaching our son to fight. Alik was a strong boy. When he was in the 5th grade he started document filing about outstanding Jews and heroes of the Great patriotic War. This was probably the first archive in Kiev and in the Soviet Union. Alik finished school with a gold medal. Again the school authorities were telling us to refuse from it. This same year Alik entered the History Department at the Kiev Pegagogical Institute. It was an unprecedented fact for its time. Deputy Head of the History Department that interviewed him stood for Alik. Alik was the only Jew at the Department. He went to the army after the Institute and later started working as teacher. He was always surrounded by the children – they’ve always loved him. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have a family of his own. A month ago Alik was elected as a people’s deputy at the Podol district administration. He is the only Jewish deputy in Podol, a famous Jewish neighborhood. He not religious, but certainly, he feels herself Jew, but presently this already he does not disturb in life’s. Pass a time state anti-Semitism.

Our daughter Marina looks like a typical Jewish girl. Abusive expressions always followed her. She finished school with a gold medal, and studied at the Physical Culture Institute and Psychology Department at the Kiev State University. She is working on her thesis now for the title of Doctor of Psychology.

In the 1990s my husband and I decided to move to Israel. But our children said “no”. It was a surprise. They didn’t want to leave Ukraine, even for the historical Motherland, our ancestors lived here, and Ukraine is our Motherland more than any other land can be. They decided to live here.

My children were not raised as Jews. But our grandson Zhenechka, Mariana’s son, born in 1998, goes to the Jewish kindergarten, knows the main prayers and all Jewish holidays. He is bringing the Jewish tradition into our house. Such turn had its grounds. Few years ago my son Alik and my daughter Marina finished the Israel University. They studied Jewish traditions, religion, culture, rites and holidays, and my husband and I attended a Jewish course at Ash-Torah in Kiev. But for us it was a kind of theoretical introduction. We do not observe traditions, we don’t know Hebrew or Yiddish, and we don’t know how to celebrate holidays or cook Jewish food. Our son introduced Jewish way of life into our house. If it were for me I would like to see us all in Israel in a few years. But the current situation in the world is not very favorable. This summer we are planing to visit my sister in Israel. We would like to take our grandson with us and show him the country. Whatever his future may be, I would like him to know and remember his Jewish identity and the history and traditions of his people. My husband and I are pensioners. We volunteer to do some work with the children. We work in the tourist club and we can’t wait when our grandson grows up to join our tourist community. We hope that the situation in Ukraine will allow us to keep our Jewish identity and our children will be able to continue their Jewish education. We have two Motherlands, and both of them are attractive. But the most important thing is a peaceful and good life here and there.

Glossary

1 Podol - was always considered and is presently considered by the jewish region of Kiev. Before the war there lived 90% Jews.

2 Komsomol – the Communistic youth organization, created by the Communist Party, so that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.

3 1930-1934 - the years of dreadful forced famine in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from farmers. People were dying in the streets, the whole villages were passing away. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that didn't want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.

4 Babiy Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the fascists on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev.

5 «Doctors' Case» - was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital charging them with murdering outstanding Bolsheviks. The «Case» was started in 1952, but was never finished in March 1953 after Stalin's death.