

# Berta Zelbert

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Russia

Moscow

Interviewer: Svetlana Bogdanova

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*Berta Zelbert is of short height, very pretty, jovial and open-hearted woman. Berta is a modest person; she did not agree to be interviewed at once. She said that there was nothing special in her vita. Berta lives with her husband Simeon Gorelik in a two-room apartment in the center of Moscow in a ten-storied house constructed in the 1950s. The newly-remodeled apartment is cozy and well-furnished. There are a lot of fiction books and technical manuals. There are pictures of the relatives, children, grandchildren on the walls as well as replica of the pieces of Russian artists.*



[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

## **My family background**

Unfortunately, there is nothing I can say about my paternal grandparents. They died at a young age, when father was a kid. All I know is that grandfather's name was Samuel Zelbert. As for paternal grandmother, I even do not know her name. Father did not tell me much about his childhood. I do not know what grandfather did for a living. Grandmother was most likely a housewife as most married Jewish women. They lived in the town of Berdyansk, on the coast of Azov sea [Ukraine, 700 km away from Kiev]. There were five children in the family: the eldest child-daughter Rena and four sons: Markus, Isaac, Haim and my father Moses. Father was the youngest child in the family. He was born in 1892. I do not know when his siblings were born. When children became orphans, Rena became their foster parent. It is hard to say how they manage to survive, what money they lived on- father never spoke about it. All of them started to work early. Since childhood father ran errands for the owner of the footwear store. I do not know what education he got, but he was literate. I kept father's letters. They were written in good Russian. During his childhood he learnt how to play clarinet. I think father got Jewish education as well. At any rate, he had all praying paraphernalia- tallith, tefillin, prayer books. Father knew Ivrit. He was religious. He

prayed at home, marked Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

When father reached drafting age, he was drafted in the tsarist army, where he served in the musicians' regiment. In father's words that regiment was even called to the palace of the Tsar of Livadia in Crimea and musicians played for the Tsar Nikolay II [1](#). When in 1914 World War I was unleashed, father and his regiment went to the front. He was in the orchestra. In late 1915 father was captured by Austrians and he was sent to the Austrian town Reisenberg together with other captives. They worked by some local hospital there. Judging by the pictures of that period of time, which my father managed to preserve, Russian captives lived pretty well there. Anyway they did not look meager in the photo. They looked rather funny. Father did not tell me much about his captivity. He said that Austrians saw no difference between Jews and non-Jews. There was no anti-Semitism. Father and Jews-captives were not differentiated by Austrians in any way, they took them as Russian soldiers. Captives were not held for a long time, they were exchanged for Austrian captives. In 1916 my father was permitted to go home. He must have passed via Byelorussian village Smilovichi on his way to Berdyansk. He met mother there.

Father's eldest sister Rena was the only one out of father's kin who stayed in Berdyansk after the Revolution [2](#) She was married to a local Jew Reinov. They had two sons, Samuel, named after grandfather, and Vladimir. During the Great Patriotic War [3](#) Rena and her family evacuated in Baku, where they had stayed. She died in Baku in 1970. Markus moved to Moscow after the Revolution of 1917, when the Pale of Settlement was abolished [4](#). He was a tailor. Markus was married and had two sons- Rafael and Moses. Markus died in Moscow in 1978. He was buried in the Jewish Vostryakovskoye cemetery in Moscow. Isaac lived in Melitopol [Ukraine, 550 km from Kiev]. He had 3 daughters: Polya, Basya and Tsilya. I do not remember anything about him. Haim left for America before revolution. He was married at that time, so he immigrated with his wife and little daughter Betya. During the Soviet regime in USSR it was dangerous to correspond with the relatives, who lived abroad [5](#). There was no correspondence with Haim and no trace left.

Maternal grandparents lived in a small Jewish village Smilovichi in Byelorussia, 30 km from Minsk. In 1930, when I was a child, I went to Smilovichi with my mother. I remember that village, motherland of my mom. It was a small Jewish village with wooden sidewalks. People were very affable. The population consisted mostly of Jews, but there were also Byelorussians, Poles and Russians. They lived friendly, willing to help each other.

I did not know maternal grandfather either. He died before I was born. The only thing I know is that his name was Jacob Shulman. I remember grandmother. Her name was Mina Shulman. I do not know her maiden name. There is hardly anything I know about my mother's childhood Grandfather was a bread-winner and grandmother was a housewife. There were three daughters in the family. My mother Tsilya was the eldest. She was born in 1900. Her sister Sofia [common name] [6](#), Jewish Sosl was born in 1903, and Anna, Jewish Hanna was born in 1906. Grandmother became a widow rather early remaining with three little daughters. She never married again. She lived in a small wooden house, where the whole family could fit. She had neither orchard nor cattle. The only thing she had was a small kitchen garden. When I stayed with grandmother, she asked me to go to the kitchen garden to take fresh cucumbers and eat them. Grandmother planted vegetables in the garden and sold them, for the family to get by. I think grandmother was very beautiful when she was young. When she was elderly, there were still traces of her former beauty. She was a very kind, caring and clever woman. Grandmother was tall and slim. She was reserved and tacit. She

must have been religious, because mother learnt about Jewish traditions from her. Grandmother also taught her how to cook Jewish dishes. Grandmother loved her daughters very much and they cared for her as well.

My parents got married in 1918. I do not know whether they had a traditional Jewish wedding. Maybe in Smilovichi, where they got married, Jewish traditions were strong even after the Revolution, when the Soviet regime oppressed any Jewish traditions [7](#). First, parents lived with grandmother and younger sisters. In 1922 I was born. I was called Batsheva. There was no room to swing a cat, when I was born and parents decided to go to father's motherland, Berdyansk. I think it was important for father that his eldest sister Rena lived there with her family. During childhood Rena was like mother to father and they were bonded. When I turned one year in December 1923 we moved to Berdyansk.

Mother's sisters also had families. Sofia married a Jew Levinchik from Smilovichi. They lived with grandmother. Sofia had two daughters. I remember Sofia very well. She was a beautiful young woman with fluffy red hair. Mother's second sister Anna Isakova after wedding moved to her husband in Zhlobino, not far from Smilovichi. She had an only daughter Zoya.

The fate of the family of grandmother Sofia was tragic. With the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War Sofia's husband went to the front and there was no information about him. He must have died at once as Belarus took the first hit of the fascist troops. Soon Germans came to Smilovichi. On the first day of occupation they shot a lot of Jews and during one of those actions grandmother Sofia, her children and all her kin from Smilovichi perished. Anna and her family managed to get evacuated before the occupation. They reached Derbent in the Dagestan republic [about 2200 km to the South from Moscow]. When the Great Patriotic War was over, they decided to stay in Derbent. Anna's husband, who was older than her, died in the 1960s. Anna lived with her daughter Zoya and her family. Then both Zoya and her husband got an offer to teach in Makhachkala and Anna stayed with her grown-up granddaughter. She was really upset that her granddaughter married a local guy who wasn't Jewish. Anna was in dumps. In 1993 she committed suicide. She was 87, but she was a rather healthy and robust women.

Father found a job at a shoe factory in Berdyansk. He had worked there until the very outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. Father was given an apartment by the factory. It was a large 3-room apartment on the first floor of 3-storied brick house. Windows faced the yard. In 1925 my junior sister Enia Zelbet was born. We called her Gena. Father was appreciated at his work. Since childhood was knowledgeable about leather as he worked in the shoe stores. Besides he was honest and bona-fide. Soon father became the deputy director of the shoe factory, being operations manager. He was a rather decent salary and we did well. Before my sister was born mother tried to work as well. First, she worked as a cashier at the store. They worked at home being given work by cooperative association of the workers. Mother learnt how to knit stockings on a knitting machine. She handed the ready-made products to the artel. Her health was poor and father insisted that mother should just take care of the household and children. Moreover, there was enough money that father earned. Sometimes in summer mother leased one room to the people who came to our town on vacation or for a treatment. It was also an additional income for the family.

My parents loved each other. Our family was friendly and happy. Father was very kind, tactful and wise. Mother was a beautiful woman and a good housewife. She was a great cook. She cooked traditional Jewish dishes best of all. Mother always cooked them for Jewish holidays. For Pesach she baked strudels and made very tasty dishes from matzah. On Purim she baked hamantashen- pies of triangular shape with poppy seeds, raisins and nuts. We enjoyed all those dishes without knowing that they were cooked for certain Jewish holidays. Mother said that she would teach everything when I would need it, but it was not important for me at that moment. She said I had to think of school.

My parents spoke Yiddish between themselves at home. Neither my sister nor I were taught Yiddish. Parents thought that there was no future in Yiddish and wanted us to speak Russian without any accent. Listening to their talks I gradually began to understand Yiddish, then I began speaking it. Father was religious. There was a mezuzah above the entrance door and father came up to it to pray. He marked Sabbath and on Friday evening mother lit candles. Jewish holidays were marked at home. I do not remember whether father went to the synagogue. I even do not remember if there was a synagogue in Berdyansk. These were the years of the active struggle against religion in the country, so all Jewish holidays were quietly marked for other people not to know about it. Moreover, we were surrounded by Russians in Berdyansk.

## Growing up

I remember Berdyansk of my childhood and adolescence. It was a flourishing southern town. In spring acacia trees bloomed and its blossom spread fragrance all over the town. There was a small land plot in front of our house. There were acacia trees and flowers planted between them. Flowerbeds were by almost every house in Berdyansk. We did not plant vegetables. There was no sense in that as they were very available on the market, besides they were very cheap. I remember Ukrainian market: reams of watermelons, melons, all kinds of apples, plums, grapes and apricots. Peasant ladies sold home-made butter on large burdock leaves, which had small dewdrops.

The town was divided in two parts-upland and lowland. The population of the town was international: Ukrainians, Russians, Greeks, Jews, Germans. Berdyansk Jews were not clustered, they lived in different parts of the town.

Before Great Patriotic war Berdyansk was a small town. There were hardly any large industrial enterprises. There was one large instrument making or tool making plant called 'Chernomorskiy' and shoe factory, where father worked. The rest enterprises were small-scale-artels and private workshops. Most Jews of Berdyansk worked in such workshops.

There were couple of Russian and Ukrainian schools in town. There were no Jewish ones. There was a theater and a very nice park in the center. There was a summer stage there. In summer symphonic orchestras came to us very often. Our family went there to listen to music. There were cabs in the city. I do not remember the cars. In general everything was within walking distance.

In summer Berdyansk population was drastically increased due to the influx of tourists. The city boasted on its beaches. The Sea of Azov is shallow and the water gets warm. There was fine sand on the beach. Thus, mothers with small kids liked that resort area. There were a lot of vineyards. There was resort hospital and mud cures. Azov muds were salves and people suffering from

different diseases came to Berdyansk from every corner of USSR. They had been bathing in the sea from spring till deep autumn. Mother always took my sister and I to the beach. When we grew up, we went there by ourselves. We took bread with butter, apples and grapes and spent a lot of time there. Then winter came and the littoral part of the coast was frozen. We could skate there. We loved our town. It was good in all seasons.

Mother was a housewife, but my sister and I went to the kindergarten. Mother did it because it was necessary for the kids to be in the team. I remember my group and my child's minder. We were given classes, taught how to draw, sculpture from plasticine. We had music and PT classes. Mother always made sure that we were neatly dressed. She also nurtured morale in us. We liked talking to father and listen to his stories. Father raised in us benevolent attitude towards people

Sister and I helped mother about the house. There was a well in the yard, but the water there was kind of salty like in Berdyansk wells. It was used for some chores, i.e. washing the floor. It was bad for laundry and cooking. We had to take fresh water from the water pump, which was by our house. My sister and I had to fetch water home.

Mother wanted me to play music. They bought a piano before I went to school. A woman, pianist, lived in our house. First, she was my music teacher. When I grew older, mother found a professional teacher for me. I really enjoyed my music classes. Later, when I had my own family, I bought a piano for my daughter and taught her how to play piano. None of us became a pianist.

When I turned 8, I went to compulsory 8-year Ukrainian schools. The choice was justified because it was close to our house and nobody had to take me in/from the school. All subjects were taught in Ukrainian. I was a good student and kept out of trouble. I had studied in Ukrainian school for 4 years, so my Ukrainian was good and I could read Ukrainian books. After the 4th grade I was transferred to Russian school, because it was a 10-year one. There Ukrainian was taught like one of the subjects. I still know Ukrainian. I had been an excellent student for 10 school years. We had wonderful teachers. Mathematics teacher was German, he was a very gifted mathematician and a teacher. His last name was Herman. He praised me and said that in future I would become a good scientist-mathematician. There were other good teachers as well. I liked literature most of all. I composed verses. They were placed in school wall newspaper. There was a good All-Union pioneer organization in the town [8](#). There were a lot of groups there: radio, literature circles, jazz studio. All schoolchildren went there after school. I was enrolled in literature circle for couple of years. I had a cloudless childhood. I was a great patriot, an active pioneer and later Komsomol member [9](#). I took part in demonstrations during Soviet holidays. We marked them both in school and at home. They were joyful and long-awaited for us. I and my coevals were avid readers of books about revolution. The characters of those books took part in revolution and civil war [10](#). They were idols for us. We adored a popular band at that time and its leader - the singer Leonid Utyosov. We could have listened to them by radio for hours. I also remember a popular movie about happy life of common workers in the USSR «Hilarious guys», where Utyosov played the part. I did not feel anti-Semitism before war. I think it did not exist. There were Jews and non-Jews among my friends. I did not care about nationality at all.

I was called Baya at home. It is a diminutive from Batsheva. When I came to school I was called Bella there. At the age of 16 I came to get my passport and the lady put the name Berta in my document.



I finished school with honors and was entitled to enter the institute without preliminary entrance exams. I wanted to enter biological department of Moscow University [M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, the best University in the Soviet Union, also well known abroad for its high level of education and research]. I was inspired by a famous physiologist Lina Shtern [11](#). I had read and heard a lot about her. I decided to become physiologist as well. Neither I nor my parents paid attention to my appeal to literature. It was considered that there should be some profession, and literature should be left for leisure. It seemed to me that there would be brilliant future ahead of me- studies in Moscow, but there were other things in store for me.

In the middle 1930s mother was getting more often and often ill. Doctor could not find what was wrong with her. Then they understood that she had trouble with her kidneys. Mother kept to bed and father took her to Zaporozhie, where doctors were more experienced. Mother must have had a heart attack because she was unconscious in the last days of her life. After autopsy they it was revealed that she had renal scarring. Mother died in early summer 1940 at the age of 39. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Berdyansk. During German occupation the cemetery was devastated and we could not find mother's grave.

I sent out letters to several institutions of higher education asking whether they could provide a room in the dormitory for me. I sent a letter to Moscow and Leningrad universities and to Moscow Institute of Physiology, headed by academician Lina Shtern. I was sure that it was an educational institution, but it turned out that it was scientific and research. They were ready to admit me in Moscow, but they could not provide a dormitory. As for Leningrad they wrote that they would provide me with a room in the dormitory. I did not have any relatives or acquaintances in Leningrad, but I had relatives in Moscow – the family of my father's brother- Markus. Then I got a letter from Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys, where it was indicated that I had been admitted and would be provided with the dormitory. Riva, Markus's wife told me about that institute. She graduated from it. She came over to us in summer and told about that institute. I thought that engineers were in demand in our country and I decided to enter the institute. In August 1939 I left for Moscow. I was admitted to the institute and given a room in the dorms. The dormitory was located in a very interesting place called 'commune-house'. It was a long 7-storied building on props. The walls, consisting of wooden boards, at the bottom were one meter long, there was an opal glass above them. There were no common rooms in the building, just separate cubicles. There was not enough room, but still each student had a separate place with a bed and a table. I was deeply immersed in studies and social life of the institute. Students were of different nationalities, there was no national discrimination. I did not feel any anti-Semitism. My life became very interesting. New pals, institute, dorms... I went to museums and theatre with my chums. For the first time in my life I was in Bolshoy theatre [12](#). I saw ballet Swan Lake composed by P. Chaikovskiy [13](#). I was rapt. Then I tried to save some money from scholarship to be able to go to Bolshoy Theatre.

During the first years of my studies at the institute I met future husband Simeon Gorelik. Simeon was also a new-comer. He was born in Mariupol [Ukraine, about 500 km from Kiev] in 1911. His father Samuel Gorelik and mother Rosa lived in Mariupol. Simeon's junior sister Tsilya, born in 1915, lived in Moscow. She finished Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages and worked as a translator. After that she was transferred to Moscow Teachers' Training Institute named after Lenin [14](#). There she defended a thesis in linguistics and worked as a teacher. Simeon studied at our

institute at the senior course and was often in that hostel. We met there. We must have liked each other at once and decided to date.

### During the war

When I lived in Berdyansk, I had a premonition of the imminent war, and I was not the only one who thought like that. It was the time of anxiety. Father was keen on politics. He read couple of papers daily. Our neighbor, Ershov, who was a cobbler and father liked to discuss the things that they read. In the evening Ershov came to us and started incessant arguments with my father, accompanied by strong emotions. At that time I did not listen to their talks, I just heard that they spoke loudly and mentioned such alarming words as «war», «Hitler», «Europe». When I left for Moscow, there was no father and his papers close to me, so the feeling of alarm was gone and it did not seem to me that the war would be unleashed before soon.

The calamity came unexpected. It was a weekend day, the 22 of June 1941. We did not have classes at the institute. All of a sudden the secretary of Komsomol Committee [editor's note: Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities] came to the hostel and announced that the war had been unleashed and all students were to come to the institute ASAP. We went to the assembly hall and started listening to the speech of the minister of the foreign affairs, V. Molotov [15](#), who informed of the unexpected attack of fascist Germany. Life changed drastically.

We had passed the exams already and had to go to Donetsk oblast of Ukraine [about 1000 km. to the South from Moscow] for practical training. During the first days of war Germans were moving rapidly towards the East of the country and rector cancelled practical training. We decided to work at the plant, which produced artificial limbs. It was not far away from our dorms. It was hard and hazardous work. In a month after the outbreak of war, Germans started bombing Moscow. Air raid alarms were announced by the radio and population had to go down to the air raid shelters, located in specially re-equipped basements of the houses. We had such a shelter in the basement of our dorm. Palpably, German planes bombed our district for the reason that there were a lot of large plants. Once bomb hit our dormitory. When we went up, we saw a mess. All glass partitions fell and smashed into smithereens. We walked on crushed glass to our cubicles. Then partitions were restored. They were made from plywood.

There was an announcement about evacuation at the institute. We were told that we had to pack only necessary things and take them to the institute. I called Simeon Gorelik and said that I was leaving Moscow. Only junior courses were evacuated. Senior students had to stay in Moscow for a while. Simeon was to stay. I did not know my future address that is why we agreed that I would write to him as soon as I arrived. On the 16th of October, we –the student of the 2nd and the 3rd year, gathered by institute and walked from Moscow in columns. Several teachers were at the lead of our column. The discipline was stern. We were heading towards Vladimir [175 km to the east from Moscow]. We spent night in devastated schools. I do not remember what we ate. We must have bought some things in villages. We had walked for about 150 km to the east from Moscow. We walked both on the highway and on the country tracks. We were lightly dressed, but it was getting cold. We also were allowed to thumb for the passing cars and ask for a lift. Of course, not all of us managed to go by car, so we were told to go to Gorkiy [about 320 km to the east from Moscow] (present Nizhniy Novgorod) and go to the industrial institute on a certain day.

One girl and I managed to get in the car, equipped with radio station. Maybe it was a mere coincidence, but in a year I worked with the same radio station in the lines. The car took us to Gorkiy. We went to the institute and met our comrades. Then we were taken to the train station. We got on the cars and went to Stalinsk [about 3200 km to the east from Moscow]. Now the town is called Novokuznetsk. It was a long trip. First of all, it was far away and secondly the train did not follow the schedule and made frequent stops. We slept on the bunks- boys and girls mixed together. It took us about two weeks to get to Stalinsk. When we arrived there, the temperature was -30° C, but we did not have warm clothes. I had a spring coat on and high rubber overshoes with hollow heels, which were in fashion at that time. For the heels not to be spoiled I inserted heeled sandals in them. I had some money on me, but it was not enough to buy warm clothes.

Upon arrival I wrote letters to Simeon and father. I did not get a response from Simeon. We did not get in touch for a long time. When we met after war, he said that he was given work in the district party committee. Then he was assigned as an instructor in the departments of the defense industry by Moscow municipal party committee. Simeon was in charge of evacuation of the plants of defense industry, armament and ammunition supply. His work was very tense. He often went to the rear front, to the locations of the evacuated plants. He was rarely at home, so he did not get my letter. Father answered me immediately. I sent a letter to the attention of my father to Buguruslan, where the inquiry bureau for evacuees was located. They resent the letter to my father. At the beginning of war when Germans were approaching Berdyansk, father took my sister and they headed to Baku (Azerbaijan) [about 1920 km to the south-east from Moscow], where his sister Rena's family and some other relatives were evacuated. They reached Derbent [about 950 km to the south- east from Moscow] and they were not allowed to go further. I do not know why it happened so. Probably there were too many fugitives in the Caucasus and it was the reason why they were left in Derbent. From father's letter I found out that Bluma, wife of Rena's eldest son Samuel did not leave Berdyansk. She and two of her children were shot by Germans. First children were shot in Bluma's presence, then she was murdered. There were cases when Germans who came of Berdyansk were on the fascist's side and gave away Jews. When the Great Patriotic War was over I recalled that before war there were Germans-paupers or dressed like vagrants. They came in the houses and asked for alms and mentioned some German names asking whether they lived there. There were a lot of Germans in town as in XVIII century there was a large German colony in Berdyansk and offspring of those colonists [16](#) stayed in the town. When the war began, I understood that those people were looking for Germans in the town to make contacts. They must have been German spies. When Great Patriotic War was unleashed our neighbor from Berdyansk wrote that a German lady came to our apartment and took all our furniture and things. We had pretty good furniture for those times and a piano. I knew that German lady. She lived in Berdyansk. In general, Berdyansk Germans behaved in different ways. There was one German girl in my class. When Germans retreated from Berdyansk, she and her family left with them. Our school mathematics teacher Herman went to the front in the front as volunteer. He served for the Red Army.

First, father and sister had a hard living- in unheated room with iced walls. Father found a job as a nurse in the hospital and sister studied at school. Then father worked for hospitals in the support staff. When the war was about to end he was deputy of the chief physician on management. Father was very smart, responsible and active man. When he found out my address he managed to send me valenki [editor's note: warm Russian felt boots], which were very handy. It was easier for me



now.

Municipal authorities gave our institute two premises –one for classes and another one for hostel. The hostel was very close to institute and it saved us a little bit from severe frosts. Living conditions made our life harder. We lived on the 2nd floor and toilets were outside. It was not very convenient, especially at night or early in the morning. When we got out of bed, we had to put a shirt or a coat, valenki and run outside. But, we understood that it was a war time and our conveniences were not the most important.

Our studies in Stalinsk took its normal course. Almost all our teachers were evacuated with us. Our Komsomol Committee from the institute also was working. Wall newspaper was issued. There were problems with food. We got food cards [17](#). We had to get up at night to get our turn in the line and then spend the whole day there to get the products. We, students, made a roster. Several people stood in the line by turns and then got the products for everybody by cards. The products were not diversified, though we were not starving and ate everything we could get, e.g. soup from herring is not very tasty, but we gladly ate it. Besides, we were fed at the institute's canteen, but we gave there some of our food cards. We were paid a stipend. We were involved in social work. We worked from one house to another and read the local fresh news. It was hard from the moral standpoint, because in most families men were in the lines and they did not get letters from them. We told things happening on the front, but the news were not comforting – everybody understood that it was perilous. So, I finished the second course of the institute. I was rather diligent and did well.

We read papers, listened to the radio and new what was happening in the lines. We had a feeling that we were living in the rear, and people were fighting in the lines. I was aware that I should not live like that and my friends had the same feeling. We were patriots. When the drafting for the girls was announced, before annual exams for the 2nd course a couple of girls and I wrote an application to the military enlistment office asking to draft us in the acting army. First, we were not called. We thought that the rector of the institute agreed with the military office not to disrupt exams. When we passed our exams in May 1942 we were invited by the military enlistment office. I remember that I asked in my application to learn some military profession. We had to go through a rather rigid medical examination – turning centrifuge and all kinds of other tests. I passed all those tests easily. Only 5 girls were selected out of 10 who applied. We were admitted to school of junior aircraft experts #66, located in the vicinity of Novosibirsk [about 2800 km to the east from Moscow]. My fellow student Svetlana Kirianova also was admitted there. Previously the school trained aircraft radio operators/gunners. Our team consisted only of women. We were told that we would be radio operators, but we would not work on the aircrafts, but at the aerodromes. We were supposed to work with aircrafts, aviation headquarters and with aviation in general. We were trained for a year and a half. We were taught by highly skilled officers. It was the first course, consisting of girls and officers were very tactful towards us. I remember our sergeant-major, who was blushing, when he handed out our togger.

We lived in barracks. There were double-tiered bunks and people slept on both tiers. We had a serious military training. Apart from training on radio operation, Morse code and radio devices, we also had a physical training. Training alarms were organized, mostly in the night time. We had to get dressed for 2 minutes and take necessary things with us – gas mask, backpack, rolled coat and then put in one through shoulder. Then we had to walk for couple of kilometers at night, no matter what kind of weather it was. Everybody had comfortable military uniform, it was even adjusted to

women. There high boots, skirts and jackets of the needed sizes. First we wore skirts and in winter we were given warm quilted pants.

In summer our entire school was sent to help out the farmers. We lived in a large army tent. We got up with a sunrise. Officers' wives worked with us and helped us with farm work. We were ignoramuses in agricultural works. We were given scythes and we mowed. We even had to stack. My friend and I were told to take a horsed cart, go through the field, gather sheaves and take them to the haystack. Men put them together in the rick. Of course, we urban girls did not know how to lead a horse. It took us to the forest and stopped. We decided that it stopped because it felt that wolves were near. I stayed in the cart and my companion returned to the village. In an hour she came back with a farmer, who looked at the bridle and said that the horse was not harnessed in the right way.

In October 1942 we finished school and I got the rank of sergeant. Five more people and I were sent to the front to the place by Maloyaroslavets, Kaluga oblast [about 115 km to the south- west from Moscow]. All of us got different directions. I had to part with my fellow student- Svetlana Kiryanova, with whom I was admitted to the school. I was sent to the western front and Svetlana to the east. In many years, we met at school accidentally, at the graduation party of our children: my son and her daughter studied at one school. We were so happy to see each other and our friendship regained.

One of the school officers accompanied us to Moscow on our way to the lines. I was a student, having finished the second course of the institute, but there were girls younger than me. That is why I was in charge of the group consisting of 5 girls. I had to take them to Maloyaroslavets, to support aerodrome battalion, where we were supposed to serve. We went to Novosibirsk in passenger car. It was October 1942. Women sold milk at the stations. It was in frozen rings. We exchanged our civilian clothes for those milk rings. Then we came to Moscow Kievskiy train station [There are nine main railroad stations in Moscow. The stations are named after train routes: from Yaroslavl'skiy train station the trains leave in Yaroslavl direction, from Belarusskiy train station in direction to Belarussia, from Kiev rail station -to Kiev etc.]. Officer, who accompanied us, left and I was the leader of the group. We went to Maloyaroslavets by train. We got off the train late at night. We did not know where to go. Maloyaroslavets was totally devastated, but there were no Germans there. We were told how to get to aerodrome and we headed there in a pitch dark night, losing our way at times. We were not sure that we moving in the right direction. We had been walking for a long time and finally we saw the light and heard somebody cry: «Stop! Who are you?». It turned out that we came to the center of the aerodrome and happened to be right by the aircrafts. We were taken to the dug-out where officers were sitting. The dug-out was lighted with oil lamp: oil and wick were in the socket body. We introduced ourselves and showed our documents. We were shown to the dug-out to stay overnight and told to come to the radio station. We started work at radio station. It was a powerful radio station, installed in a covered truck. It was called battle radio station. Our work was to hear the signals over headphones in the chaos of sounds, respond, connect with the radio station, which was seeking us, and record the message. Good knowledge of Morse code was necessary for that. We really knew it very well. We worked in shifts, each consisted of the chief of radio station, mechanic and three radio operators. We were called radio telegraphists (code operators). Most radio operators were girls, but there were boys as well, but very few. Radio stations were always based on the edge of the aerodrome. I was to be disguised.

Battalion consisted of reconnoiters, telephone operators and code operators. There was a cook and some other support staff. On a new position (we were constantly moving towards west) we knew the certain place where we were supposed to settle. The reconnoiterers were to come to the place of the re-dislocation to find a certain place. Besides, if we had to spend a night in the dug-out, they made bunks for us or perched tents.

We worked on field aerodromes. They were not based on the very leading edge, but close to it. We always were by aerodrome and worked with the aircrafts, taking off from aerodrome. They transmitted messages during reconnaissance or battle. We took the messages and sent them to the headquarters of our battalion. When we worked with headquarters all radio operators worked with Morse code and when we were working with fighter planes or attack planes, we sent voice messages. The pilots at those aircrafts had necklace microphones on the helmets. That is why they did not use Morse code. The hardest was to work with bombardiers as there were highly-skilled radio operators, who knew Morse code better than we did and transmitted the messages at rapid speed. Our work was very responsible. If code operator failed to take the message right, it was next to impossible to decipher it when it came to the special department. If things like that happened code operator, who took the message, was called as he knew where he made a mistake.

Aerodrome support battalion served aviation regiments, which were either landing or taking off from the aerodromes. We were not attached to any constant aviation regiment. For a while regiments positioned at one aerodrome, then they moved forward and repositioned at other aerodromes. Our battalion stayed at one and the same aerodrome and served other regiments.

Subdivisions changed. We had been moving westward. We started from Maloyaroslavets, then moved to Smolensk [about 400 km to the west from Moscow]. We were allowed to go to the bathhouse in the vicinity of Smolensk. We were on the hill and close to us there was a bathhouse. There was a river by the mountain. We took water there foretasting a good bath. Hardly had we started bathing, when air raid alarm was announced. We did not manage to take a bath. It was a pity as it was my first and last bath in a true wooden Russian bathhouse.

There were quite a few girls in the regiment: apart from radio operators there were telephone operators, civilians and cooks. Life conditions were hard for the girls. We were not given brassieres and we sewed them from the foot wraps. I used the foot wraps for its intended purpose only at the military school. We had undershirts from coarse calico and underpants (I could not get used to them). In general our uniform was pretty good. I cannot say we could not get by.

For the radio station to work incessantly we had to charge accumulators. I did not know how to do it as nobody explained me and I took with my bare hands. My hands were inflamed, but I had to work all the time. Rather often I had to return from the duty at night and it was scary. There were no lights to find my way. Sometimes I walked probing telephone cable and I had a rifle behind my back. I had to use it if somebody attacked me. It was dreadful. Pitch dark night and I, a small girl with a huge heavy rifle. I had to overcome fear and get to the subdivision without showing that I was scared.

We spent a night in the forsaken houses, which the reconnoiterers found for us, in the tents or in dug-out. We often used readymade dug-out without knowing who left them - Germans or our soldiers. Sometimes in winter dug-out were so covered with snow that we could not open the door. We had double-tiered bunks in dug-out. We slept both on the top and on the bottom tiers.

There were people on duty in our unit. One winter I was on duty by the river, caught cold and got severely ill. I thought I would die. Everybody left for work and I was the only one who stayed in lying on the bunk and awaiting death. My young body coped with the disease and I was cured with warm tea and good care. So, I even did not go to the hospital.

Pilots lived separately from aerodrome support staff, but we got in touch on different occasions. We talked to them and dreamt what we would be doing after war. Later on when we received messages from the pilot, with whom we talked on the eve. A pilot or a navigator said in his necklace mike that he was having a battle over some town and all of a sudden there was no connection and complete stillness. That was it. It meant that he was pranged. They did not say good-bye, I understood what had happened. It is difficult to say how many our aircrafts were brought down by Germans. I think - a lot. When we moved westwards, fewer of our aircrafts were taken down as compared to the previous times.

In winter we had to clean aerodrome landing strip from ice and snow. Men broke ice and girls loaded that ice on the trucks. It was a hard work. In the morning we worked rather swiftly, but later we could barely lift heavy spades.

German aircrafts often raided aerodrome. There was no frequent bombing as aircraft guns on the aerodromes repelled raids of German aircrafts. Though, sometimes German aircrafts broke through. We were near aerodrome and radio station was always to be disguised. Germans hunted our aerodromes and could easily crash radio station. In summer it was hard to disguise the station. It was positioned in some bushes. In winter it was difficult as well we had to cover the station with a white cloth.

I was surrounded by young people, mostly 20-year old guys and girls. Those, who were over 30, seemed old to us. When we had spare time we had amateur contests, where we sang, recited verses, told funny stories: youth... We had a very good political officer [18](#). At that time he seemed elderly to me, he was 40. He planned amateur performances. Actors, the spouses, came to us. Husband played a musical instrument and wife was singing. They also took part in our concerts. I composed verses, I even sent them to the paper of the first airforce army «Stalinsk pilot». I was sent to the meeting of young poets and prose writes, arranged by the paper «Stalinsk pilot». It happened on some other aerodrome and our commandment gave me aircraft «U-2», to get there. I remember that for the holiday of the 7th of November [19](#) our political officer told me to write a poem- for the choir to sing it and for people to recite it. I wrote a poem about Stalin and Lenin. Besides, we had political classes. We released battle leaflets. We also had dancing parties. Those who were off duty came over to dance. There was courtship and flirtation and love. Guys considered me to be a pure girl. Once girls started smoking as they were worried expecting a raid. I had never smoked before and decided to try. I asked one of the girls to give me a cigarette. A Ukrainian soldier stood close by. He was older than me, about 30. He told me to drop a cigarette. He also said that I should not smoke as I was so pretty and cigarette was not becoming to me. So, it was the last time I smoked.

We were heading towards the west. It was the time when our troops were attacking. We stayed in Lithuania for a while. Then we went through Poland and later came to Eastern Prussia. Our work was complicated because there such towns we did not know of and we had to send messages anyway. We always had to ask to repeat the name of the local towns when we were

communicating with the pilots. Of course, pilots were irritated sometimes as every second was precious for them. There were cases when I could not really catch the names. It was easier when the navigator gave me a map so I could learn the names of the towns. Once I was reprimanded. I had to substitute for a telephone operator who was sick and I was sent to work on the switchboard. I did not know how to work on that equipment and nobody showed me. Suddenly, the commander of the battalion asked to connect him with somebody. I started frantically shove attaching plugs to the plugholes, but I did it wrong. He asked who was working on the switchboard and gave me 10 days of extra duty.

It was dangerous in the Western and in Eastern Prussia. Our troops chased Germans, liberated towns, but German units were in fact periodically attacking our military subdivisions and making skirmishes. One year and a half before the end of war, I was caught in the middle of one of those skirmishes. I was wounded in the hand and was sent to field hospital. Meanwhile my battalion was repositioned. My hand healed and I was discharged from the hospital in March. Since nobody knew where my battalion was positioned, I was offered to transfer to the forming reserve regiment. That reserve regiment was to head eastward, not to the west. I could not get it. I had been in the lines all the time and was supposed to go to the rear to the east without seeing the victory. I do not know whether it was true, but they said that the reserve regiment would have to attend the courses for tractor drivers. For the first time during my front-line experience I did not obey. I gave my documents to the commander of the forming regiment and went to the opposite direction - to the west. I was walking with a backpack, without documents. I had an idea where to go. When I was in the hospital, commanders of the tank squad came to the hospital. The squad was positioned not far from the it. I knew that there were radio operators in the tank squad. I walked along road and read the signs of our squads. It was written on the sign: «Administration - and the last name of the commander of the squad». Our cars were going back and forth on the roads of Eastern Prussia. Our soldiers were marching along the road. Finally I reached the tank squad. I went to the commander and asked him to help me get to my unit or leave me in his squad. I was checked by the special department [responsible for checking political reliability of the troopers. There were special departments in all civil offices, army units and in prisons] and afterwards I was left in the tank squad as radio operator. Tank men had different radio station - portable. It was not installed on the covered truck, like it was with the pilots. It was easy to assemble and carry that radio station. We worked both with a key and with Morse code. I went to Königsberg [20](#) with that tank squad. When we reached Königsberg, the snow had already thawed. There were corpses of our soldiers on the ground. They were lying in the position they faced death. Königsberg was taken, when it was snowing and the cadavers were covered with snow. In spring the snow melted. It was definitely a dreadful scene.

I and other girls radio-operators lived in the houses left by Königsberg population. We were well fed. The food was cooked by field kitchen. I even drank 100 grams of vodka on the front (given to me in the ration), but I never got drunk.

I got along with my fellow soldiers. I should say that all of us were united by a strong patriotic feeling on the lines. We were aware that the country was in great danger. Patriotism, love for the motherland and feeling of duty were not mere words for us, we felt each of those notions in our soul. There was no national discrimination. We had to think of other things at that time.



We lived and worked in the town Königsberg, when it had not yet been totally captured. First, we stayed in the basement of the house. We did not see what was happening on the top since we stayed down in the basement by the radio stations. When we went outside, we saw a pandemonium. There was a strong artillery shooting from different weapons. There was a terrible clatter and a dense fog. Germans were desperately fighting. There were a couple of strong citadels in Königsberg. Our artillery had to crush the walls of those fortresses before taking them. Only then Königsberg could be captured. Tank men were totally exhausted and black from the soot after the battle. I was in touch with them and sent messages to the headquarters via radio. Commander of the headquarters was close to me and took messages where the tanks were and indicated directions for the tanks to take. It was much more difficult for me than working with the pilots. It was the leading edge. Half of three quarters of Königsberg was taken by Germans. Besides, our planes were bombing military sites and communications, but Americans and English people made carpet bombings of the towns, which were supposed to be taken by us after victory. They crashed the town of Dresden and they bombed Königsberg that way as well.

War did not finish for us after Königsberg had been captured. Our squad was told to liberate the port Pillau (now Baltiysk) [about 1000 km to the west from Moscow]. It was a historic citadel. There were huge marine weapons. There was a German tank regiment, several infantry squads in Pillau. Soon, they started attacking and even took a lot of captives. There were a lot of battles and assaults. Especially I remembered one fierce battle. It was called 'paratroopers on the armor'. Tank men were inside on the tank and infantrymen were on the armor. We had to maintain an incessant communication in order to know the location of the tanks and periodically advise them on directions. Port Pillau was taken by our troops. Having liberated it we got an order to come back to Königsberg. On our way to Königsberg some German squads were still resisting and we were caught in the skirmishes. We were ordered to leave the cars, lie down and disguise ourselves. There was «Katyusha» in front of us. [editor's note: The 82mm BM-8 and 132mm BM-13 **Katyusha rocket launchers** were built and fielded by the [Soviet Union](#) in [World War II](#). The launcher got this unofficial, but immediately recognized in the [Red Army](#), name from the title of a Russian wartime song, [Katyusha](#).] That gun «Katyusha» was working. I cannot even put it into words. There was such a clatter that it was difficult to discern whether the shells were coming from us or from Germans. The operation on capturing Königsberg lasted from the 6th till 9th or 10th of April.

I did not have to contact local population, but I often caught malignant stealthy looks. Once I broached a conversation with one young German lady. She said she had been raped by our soldiers.

When I was in the front, I kept corresponding with my father. He kept my letters. I did not write about my work in detail as we were banned to write about our work and location. I just wrote that we were advancing and moving to another location. I also wrote about my feelings. Father did not know where I was, he knew only the number of my field post.

We could feel that the war was winding up. One night we heard the shooting while we were sleeping in the tent of the ladies –radio operators. We darted outside and saw that our tank men were shooting in the air from all the weapons they had. They were celebrating Victory Day. We were overwhelmed with joy. The whole garrison was on parade.

I got awards at the end of war. I did not have too many of them. I was given a medal «For Bravery» [21](#), medal «For Liberation of Königsberg» [Established June 9, 1945. The medal was awarded to all servicemen who were directly involved in the capture of Königsberg as well as for the officers who led the operations. Over 752 thousand medals were awarded]. After war I got jubilee medals, devoted to commemoration of the dates of the Victory Day Great Patriotic War Order of the first class [22](#).

After victory I stayed in Königsberg for a while. There was a party committee and I was assigned in charge of it. I became the candidate of the party on the front and when I returned home I became the member of the party. I was demobilized in July. There were no obstacles for my demobilization since I was a volunteer and did not have to serve in the army. Upon demobilization I went to my father in Derbent.

When father lived in Derbent he married a Russian woman Anna Torgasheva, who a doctor in the hospital, where father was working. Anna was a very good woman- kind and caring. My junior sister still went to school. They lived in Anna's place. I was really happy to see my kin, but I was not going to stay with them. I wanted to return to my institute. I was given a certificate at the military enlistment office in Derbent saying that I was not liable for military service. Then I was issued a passport using the data from that certificate. I went to Moscow and regained studies at the institute by the beginning of the school year. When arrived in Moscow I caught malaria. I must have caught it in Dagestan. Father's brother Markus invited me over and I lived in his place before I got better. I could not stay with them permanently because Markus, his wife Riva and two sons Rafael and Moses lived in a poky room in the communal apartment [23](#). Then I recouped and regained my studies at the institute. I was enrolled for the 3rd course and moved to the dormitory where I used to live before war. Then I got ill again. I had a sharp pain in abdomen and my roommate took me to the hospital. By chance I met Simeon Gorelik, whom I knew before war. I said that I returned to the institute, but was to be hospitalized at the moment. He came to the hospital immediately. We met for the first time after the war and never parted again. On the 2nd of December 1945 we got married. At that time Simeon worked in Moscow party committee. After 1945 he decided to quit his service at the party and start a scientific career. He left Moscow party committee and entered post-graduate studies by the institute of Steel and Alloys. He was writing candidate thesis for 2 years, though usually it took people 3 years. In general he was a gifted man. Then he defended doctorate thesis [Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [24](#). All his life Simeon had worked for the Institute Steel and Alloys. He was conferred the title of a professor and an honorable scientist. In 1944 he was conferred with the order of Red Banner [25](#). Simeon is still working for that institute.

Simeon had a room in a communal apartment. When we got married, I left the dormitory and moved to Simeon. Before war his parents lived in Mariupol [about 960 km to the South from Moscow]. During the war they got evacuated and moved to Simeon in Moscow. In 1945 sister Gena came to Moscow when she finished school. She entered Moscow Institute of Meat processing and Dairy Industry. She lived with us while studying. Upon graduation she acquired the specialty of dietitian. She came back to Derbent. There she married a very good and talented man Davletkhanov, Lezghin. Davletkhanov in due time became a great manager of the regional scale. He was the deputy chairman of the council of minister of Dagestan. After getting married my sister and her family lived in Makhachkala [about 1600 km to the South from Moscow]. Sister worked in the canteens and restaurants as a dietitian. Sister had two children: the eldest daughter Alla and

junior son Enver. Alla finished construction institute in Moscow. She married a Jew from Makhachkala. In couple of years she defended candidate thesis at Moscow construction institute. In couple of years in late 1970s she gave birth to a daughter and a son. Then her family left for Israel. She and her husband worked there. Her husband worked for American company. Then he was offered a job at the same company in the USA. Alla, her husband and junior son moved to the USA. Daughter remained in Israel. She is currently studying at Jerusalem University. Gena did not want to immigrate neither to Israel nor America. She stayed in Makhachkala. She died in 1998. She was seriously afflicted with diabetes, so she felt unwell. Sister was buried in Makhachkala, in the town cemetery. Her husband died a year before. Their son Enver lives in Makhachkala with his family.

In 1946 I gave birth to my son Evgeniy. I was still studying and writing my diploma. It was difficult: family, house chores. We lived separately from Simeon's parents in a small room which he previously got. My mother-in-law Rosa Gorelik was of big help. My son was in day nursery before he caught whooping-cough. She was ill for a long time. I did not give him the day-nursery after that and we hired a babysitter. She was an elderly lady. When son was fit for the kindergarten, I took him there.

### After the war

After war father lived in Derbent with his second wife Anna Torgasheva. They lived very well, in full harmony. They came to Moscow for a couple of times and stayed in the family. Anna died before father in 1981. Father lived by himself. He caught cold and died in 1982. I do not know if there was a Jewish cemetery in Derbent. I do not think there was. Jewish rites were not observed at the funeral. Father used to communicate with the family of my sister Gena. They were friends with her husband Lesghin. He kept in touch with Dovletkhanov's family. They loved him. So, it was a secular funeral.

In 1948 I finished institute and got a mandatory job assignment [26](#) at Moscow 2nd bearing fund not far from our house. I had worked there for 12 years.

In 1951 my daughter Olga was born. Our family was always friendly. Children were raised to be honest, respect and love family and parents. They knew that they were Jews and did not reject it. Though, they were not raised Jewish. Husband and I did not stick to the traditions in everyday life. There were few people in Moscow who raised children in Jewish traditions. They were raised in international spirit. Our son married a Russian girl and my elder grandson also is married to a Russian. There were no national discords in our family.

Children got good education. Evgeniy finished Moscow State University, Applied Mathematics Department. He is currently working for one of the commercial banks in Moscow. Olga finished Moscow institute of Steel and Alloys. She worked in a scientific research institute. She has 2 children and a grandson. She recently stopped working. Now she is a housewife. Now I have 3 grandchildren and one great grandchild. Evgeniy has a son Dmitriy Gorelik and daughters Olga has two sons: Sergey and Mikhail Shtern. My great grandson's is Artyom Shtern, Sergey's son.

When I was working at the plant I entered post-graduate evening school by Energy Institute and defended candidate dissertation. I was deputy of the chief metallurgist of the plant. Being the candidate of science I went to work in All-Union Institute of Bearing Industry. I started as an engineer and was promoted to the position of the laboratory chief. I had worked for that institute

by 1987 and retired.

In 1952 Institute Steel and Alloys, where my husband worked, built a house in the center of Moscow. There was board which selected people who should be given apartment in that house. The members of the board came to our place and saw that the four of us were living in one room of the communal apartment and decided to give us apartment in the house built by the institute. My husband of assigned to be in charge of the finishing work. Of course, he could choose any apartment for us. But he turned out to be a modest man and he chose a 2-room apartment, though he could have taken 4 or 5-room apartment. We were happy with the apartment we had got. My husband and I are still living there. We bought the apartment for our son, when he was in his graduate year. Father of my daughter's husband worked as a deputy chief engineer of Metrostroy and was entitled for the apartment. We helped with money to furnish the apartment.

I think we always pertained to the middle class- neither rich nor poor. I do not remember times when we had to borrow money from somebody because there was not enough before the salary. We always bought things we could afford. We were lucky to buy dacha [summer house] dirt cheap. It was sold to us by husband's friend from childhood. It was half of the house out of Moscow. Our children grew up there. Our family used to like spending time there on the weekends and during vacations and we still do. We liked to mark holidays at home. We always marked birthdays of all family members. Of course, we celebrated the soviet holidays liked by us since childhood - 1st of May, 7th of November, Soviet Army Day [27](#), Victory Day [28](#).

Husband and I traveled a lot both in the USSR and abroad. My husband has trouble with his stomach, he has anacidity so he had to go through the treatment in Essentuki [about 1400 km to the South from Moscow]. We often went to that resort. Besides, we went skiing on winter vacation for two weeks. When it became possible to take tourist trips abroad, we enjoyed traveling throughout the world, for example in 1966 we took a tour Cuba-Czechoslovakia-Italy. We went to India to Ceylon. I was in Paris and Portugal. Then my husband went to Paris with me. We also went to London. Besides, my husband went to Bulgaria and lived there for two months. So, I think we have seen quite a lot around the world.

Fortunately, our family was not affected by any state actions against Jews, starting from assassination of Mikhoels [29](#), arrest of Jewish anti-fascist committee [30](#), so called campaign against cosmopolites [31](#) etc. The year 1948 was the time of anxiety. Mikhoels was assassinated, then arrests started. I remember the day when in 1953 there was an article revealing «doctors' plot» [32](#). When I came to work I saw that terrible article on my desk. Somebody did it, but I cannot say that I came across open anti-Semitism. Of course, all of us had to go through that. We read the articles, but we did not believe what was written as we understood that it was baiting of Jews.

I liked the idea of the foundation of the state of Israel. I remember that prime-minister of Israel Golda Meir [33](#) came to Moscow. She was welcomed by the crowds of the Jews. Husband and I visited our niece in Israel to see how they live there. We liked the state. My husband and I visited Israeli Technical University. They had a very nice university and we liked it a lot. Anyway I would not like to stay there. I did not want to leave Moscow.

I think of perestroika [34](#) positively. Earlier we had to stay in the lines to get all kinds of products and because of perestroika we managed to start a more civilized mode of life. When I had to buy the furniture for my apartment, I went to the furniture store every day and marked my turn in order

to get it. Now things are available. There are products in the store and industrial goods.

Now I am taking part in Jewish social life. I am a member of the group of the Friendship with Israel, International Board of Russian Committee of Russian Veterans of War. I am working for that group. Sometimes we get requests to provide charitable assistance and we are doing it. Now we got a request from the Jewish community Fund 'Hurry to do Good' to assist the victims of the terror in Israel and Russia. We responded to that request. We can afford it. I think we have a comfortable living. I have a rather decent pension for being a veteran of war. My husband works and receives pension. We are not needy.

Now when I am thinking of my life I can say that I am not ashamed of it. I only regret that I am not young any more.

## Glossary

### **1 Nicolas II (1868 -1918)**

the last Russian emperor from the House of Romanovs (1894 \* 1917). After the 1905 Revolution Nicolas II was forced to set up the State Duma (parliament) and carry out land reform in Russia. In March 1917 during the February Revolution Nicolas abdicated the throne. He was shot by the Bolsheviks in Yekaterinburg along with his family in 1918

### **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 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.

### **4 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

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



privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

## **5 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

## **6 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

## **7 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.

## **8 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts 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.

## **9 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.

## **10 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored

setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### **11 Shtern, Lina (1878 - 1968)**

physiologist, professor, academician of the AS of the USSR and AMS of the USSR. Graduated from Geneva University and worked there at the Department of Physiology and Chemistry. Shtern was the first female professor at Geneva University. She lived in the USSR since 1925, was head of the Department of Physiology of Moscow State University and director of the Institute of Physiology that she organized. Shtern was the first female academician in the AS USSR. In 1941 she was elected to the presidium of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. In 1949 she was arrested for participation in the committee. She was rehabilitated in 1953.

### **12 Bolshoi Theater**

World famous national theater in Moscow, built in 1776. The first Russian and foreign opera and ballet performances were staged in this building.

### **13 Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyich (1840-1893)**

One of the most famous Russian composers. He wrote operas, concertos, symphonies, songs and short piano pieces, ballets, string quartets, suites and symphonic poems, and numerous other works. Tchaikovsky was opposed to the aims of the Russian nationalist composers and used Western European forms and idioms, although his work instinctively reflects the Russian temperament. His orchestration is rich, and his music is melodious, intensely emotional, and often melancholy. Among his best known works are the Swan Lake (1877) and The Nutcracker (1892).

### **14 Lenin (1870-1924)**

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

### **15 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

### **16 German colonists/colony**

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to

settle in Russia.

## **17 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **18 Political officer**

These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

## **19 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

## **20 Königsberg (since 1946 Kaliningrad)**

6 April 1945: the start of the Königsberg offensive, involving the 2nd and the 3rd Belorussian and some forces of the 1st Baltic front. It was conducted in part of the decisive Eastern Prussian operation (the purpose of this operation was the crushing defeat of the largest grouping of German fascist forces in Eastern Prussia and the northern part of Poland). The battles were crucial and desperate. On 9 April 1945 the forces of the 3rd Belorussian front stormed and seized the town and the fortress of Königsberg. The battle for Eastern Prussia was the most blood shedding campaign in 1945. The losses of the Soviet army exceeded 580 thousand people (127 thousand of them were casualties). The Germans lost about 500 thousand people (about 300 of them were casualties). After WWII, based on the decision of the Potsdam Conference (1945) the northern part of Prussia including Königsberg was annexed to the USSR (the southern part was annexed with Poland)

## **21 Medal for Valor**

established on 17th October 1938, it was awarded for 'personal courage and valor in the defense of the Motherland and the execution of military duty involving a risk to life'. The award consists of a 38mm silver medal with the inscription 'For Valor' in the center and 'USSR' at the bottom in red enamel. The inscription is separated by the image of a Soviet battle tank. At the top of the award are three Soviet fighter planes. The medal suspends from a gray pentagonal ribbon with a 2mm blue strip on each edge. It has been awarded over 4,500,000 times.

## **22 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

## **23 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.

## **24 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees**

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktorontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

## **25 Order of the Combat Red Banner**

Established in 1924, it was awarded for bravery and courage in the defense of the Homeland.

## **26 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.

## **27 Soviet Army Day**

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

### **28 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.

### **29 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

### **30 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)**

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

### **31 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 anti-Semitic 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'.

### **32 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.

### **33 Meir, Golda (1898-1978)**

Born in Kiev, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

### **34 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

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