

Tamara Koblik

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Kishinev

Moldova

Interviewer: Nathalia Fomina

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Tamara Koblik is a tall slender lady with thick short hair and fine regular features. Her movements are quick and she has a sharp tongue. She has excellent memory and her story is full of interesting details. Though she was operated on cancer recently, she looks very well. And only a bit later one can see that her physical condition falls behind her spiritual energy that nature generously endowed this charming lady with. Tamara gets tired and grows pale. She coughs, but she doesn't want to stop telling her story. As for me, I felt like listening to her for eternity. Tamara and her husband live in a three-bedroom apartment in a 5-storied apartment building in a picturesque neighborhood in Kishinev, on the bank of an artificial lake, a favorite recreation area with the townsfolk. Tamara's husband Monia, an intelligent and gentle person, a hospitable host, is devoted to his wife. He also had a surgery, but neither of them makes an impression of a sickly person. Their comfortable apartment is stylishly furnished, and this, for sure is an accomplishment of the hostess: nice furniture in the living room, many books in bookcases, a nice china set and a beautiful carpet of dim shades. One's attention is attracted by a silver menorah displayed the cupboard. Tamara is a hospitable and creative person: she offers an assortment of jams that she has made herself. The one of white sweet cherries with lemon peels has a great taste.

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My family background

I've never seen my paternal grandmother or grandfather. My paternal grandfather Gedaliye Podriadchik lived in Soroki [according to census of 1897 there were 15,351 residents and 8,783 of them were Jews. In 1910 there was a synagogue and 16 prayer houses in Soroki] in Bessarabia [1](#). I don't know what my grandfather did for a living, but he provided well for the family. My father's mother died in 1915, when he was 11-12 years old. I don't even know her name. My grandfather remarried. The stepmother did not love her stepchildren. I don't know how many he had. I've only heard that my father had a brother. He lived with his family in Soroki. I remember that my father and his brother had a dispute about an old and a new houses. This must have been about my grandfather's property or something. We had papers for these houses with us in evacuation during the Great Patriotic War [2](#), I remember the folder well. After the war mama visited Soroki. The

houses were ruined. I have no information about what happened to my father brother's family. My paternal grandfather Gedaliye died in the early 1930s. Mama told me that my father wanted to name their son, who was born then, after my grandfather.

My papa Elih Podriadchik was born in Soroki in 1903. Papa was gifted and studied well – the family could afford to pay for his education. He wanted to become a pharmacist, but after his mother died – he was 12 – he was sent to study tailor's business. He stayed with his father for some time, but his stepmother was such a witch that she charged him for doing his laundry. When he grew a little older, he moved to Floreshty. Some time later he managed to get his own tailor's shop. He met my mother in Floreshty.

My mother's parents lived in Rezina [a town in Bessarabian province, Orgeyev district, according to the census of 1897 there were 3 652 residents in Rezina, 3 182 of them were Jews]. People called my maternal grandfather 'David fin Kishinev' – David from Kishinev in Yiddish. I think my grandfather moved to Rezina after the Jewish pogrom in 1903 [3](#). My grandfather married my grandmother way after 40. He had six children from his first marriage: Leib, Berl, Haim, Leika, Riva and Golda. I think my grandfather's second marriage was prearranged. My grandfather was a decent man. He owned a shoemaker's shop. He and grandmother Sura had five more children. Grandfather David Trostianetskiy died in 1920. He caught cold during the ceremony of circumcision of his first grandson, Leib's son Itzyk-Moishe. My grandfather David was buried in Rezina. My mother went there every year, as we say – to 'keyveres' [Yiddish for graves], till the end of her life.

I remember my maternal grandmother Sura Trostianetskaya a little. She came from Rezina. I don't know her maiden name, but I know that her mother's name was Tema. Grandmother Sura got married, when she was very young. My grandmother's sister Enia married my grandfather David's older son Leib. The father and the son married two sisters. However, it took Leib and Ania some time to obtain a permit to get married. They visited several rabbis until one of them decided that they were not too close relatives and it was all right for them to get married. He only told them that their successors could not have any relationships of this kind since this would be incest. When my grandfather died, his and my grandmother's children were still small. Keila, the oldest, was just 14 years old, my mother was 12, and Isaac, the youngest, was 8. They went to lie with their relatives, which was a customary thing with Jewish families. After my grandfather died my grandmother began to bake Friday bread for Jewish families in Rezina and gained great respect of all Jewish housewives in Rezina. I remember visiting my grandmother in Rezina with my mama and my older sister Sheiva. Grandmother Sura was short and pretty – my mother was like her very much. There was a bunch of small children messing around her. I will never forget the way grandmother said: "Come here, I will make some the 'supa de legume' for you'. This word had so much magic in it for me until I got to know recently that it means 'vegetable soup' in Romanian. But it sounded do beautiful!

My mother's stepbrother Leib, who was married to my grandmother's sister Enia and was my mother's uncle, therefore, had eight children: sons Itzyk-Moishe and Yasha and daughters Beila, Haika, Sosia, Gitl, Pesia and Tamara. Leib was a shoemaker. He owned a shoe shop where he made individual shoes. His older son Itzyk-Moishe worked with him. Leib had his permanent clients: wealthy and respected people in Rezina. Leib's family lived in a nice two-storied houses. They had a 'casa mare' [this is how Moldavians call the largest room in their house]. Leib's youngest daughter Tamara and her sister Pesia made beautiful dolls. They bought dolls' heads, made their

bodies and fancy gowns for them. They were single before the war. Both sons of my uncle Leib served in the Soviet army during the Great Patriotic War. The daughters and their father were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa. After the war they returned to their house in Rezina.

My mother's stepbrothers Berl and Haim moved to Palestine before I was born, they must have been the chalutsim . All I remember is that there were some letters from them, also something about the property. Uncle Berl was said to be rich. My mama, papa, Sheiva and I got photographed to send him our photo to Palestine.

Now about Leika. Leika married David Portnoy. They lived in Kipercheny. Her husband was a baker. She had five children: Dora, Pesia, Gitl, Rivka, Tsylia. Aunt Leika and her family evacuated to Central Asia during the war. After the war they returned to Moldavia.

In 1918, when Bessarabia was annexed to Romania, my mother's stepsister Rivka was visiting in Rybnitsa. When Rezina became Romanian and Rybnitsa became Soviet, she could not return to Rezina. She stayed in Rybnitsa where she married Fishl Kushnir. He was a shoemaker. Rivka was a shoemaker. They had sons David and Fima and daughter Genia. We didn't see her before 1941. In 1940, when Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR, we still failed to meet her and then the war began. Riva's older son David was at the front where he was promoted to the rank of an officer. Riva and her family were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa. All of them survived. Aunt Riva died in Rybnitsa in the 1970s. Her children lived in Chernovtsy.

My mother's stepsister Golda was mentally ill. She lived with grandmother Sura and I was a little afraid of her.

My mother's older sister Keila also lived with grandmother. She divorced her first husband for his drinking problems and then she remarried.

My mother's sister Eidl got married and moved to Beltsy. Her family name was Priest. During the war, during evacuation her two children were burnt in a railcar, when a bomb hit their train. She arrived in Central Asia where she found her older daughter Rita, who survived the air raids and was taken to a children's home from where children went to beg for food in the streets and at the railway station. Aunt Eidl recognized her there. Rita said that Eidl approached her, lifted her dress - Rita had a birthmark on her leg: 'You are my daughter'. She took her to the place where she lived. Rita had burn scars for the rest of her life and she was lame - - the war!.. After the war they moved to Rybnitsa. Later Rita got married, moved to Tiraspol and my mother moved there to live with her. Rita finished two forms at school and earned her living by sewing. She was a good housewife. She was a nice and open-hearted person. Her family was poor. Aunt Eidl died in Tiraspol in the 1980s. I went to her funeral. There was me and my mother's sister Sonia at the funeral. Of course, if aunt Eidl had been rich, it would have been different... I saved money to install a gravestone on her grave.

My mother's sister Sonia, born in 1910, married Grisha Gandelman from Tiraspol. He was a tinsmith. They lived in Orgeyev. During the Great Patriotic War he was at the labor front in the Ural since Bessarabians were not regimented to the army. [Soviet power did not trust the former Romanian citizens] During the war my aunt was with us in Makhachkala and Bukhara at first, but then she moved to her husband in the Ural where he worked in a mine. Her daughter Mania was born there. After the war they returned to Orgeyev.

My mother's younger brother Isaac was born in 1912. He was a barber. He had a wife and two children: David and Genia. His wife Lisa was a beautiful plump woman, very cheerful and joyful. Isaac was recruited to the Soviet army in 1941. His wife and two children evacuated with Lisa's family. Uncle Isaac came as far as Berlin with his troops and was wounded twice. After the war they returned to Orgeyev. Uncle Isaac had black hair, and there was a gray streak where a bullet had passed. He was handsome, always friendly and cheerful and much loved in Orgeyev.

My mama Beila Podriadchik was born in Rezina in 1907. She was the second daughter in the second marriage of my grandfather. Mama was just 12 years old, when my grandfather died, and her 'feter' [uncle in Yiddish], he must have been my grandfather's brother, took her to his home in Floreshty. 'Feter' taught her his tailor's business. He said: 'she will work for me, and I will save for her dowry'. She was a poor relative, and she had to fetch water to their house for the period from 13 to 20 years of age. She was booming with health, a very pretty girl. Boys were gazing at her and bothering her. Once one of them asked her: 'Girl, how many buckets of water does one have to fetch to become a dressmaker?' Mama looked at him and replied: 'As many as one is destined to fetch'. Another rascal intending to make a joke and said even a worse thing: 'I'd rather lie with you than with typhus'. Mama felt very hurt, but she held back her tears and replied: 'No, I'd rather have typhus'. Mama's first love was in Rezina. His name was Ehil Spivak. He returned her feelings, but Ehil was the only son in a wealthy family. He was spoiled, and besides, his parents did not appreciate his connection to mama.

My mama met my father in Floreshty at the age of 20. He liked her at once, so pretty she was. They began to see each other. From what my mama told me, they walked to dancing in the neighboring village of Markuleshty, 3 km from Floreshty. Mama loved dancing and long walks didn't bother her at all. When papa proposed to her, she only had 17,000 lei of dowry while the standard amount of the dowry was 20 thousand. Papa said: 'I will add the remaining amount so that people cannot say anything about you having less than a girl is expected to have'. They got married in 1929. Papa rented his shop facility from Petru Turcan, the owner of an inn in Floreshty. He was Moldavian. Mama and papa lived in a room in this shop. My older sister Sheiva was born in 1930. Mama told me that when she visited Rezina a year later, she bumped into Ehil. There was so much pain in his eyes as he looked at her: 'I'd rather Keila had this baby'. My mother's sister Keila didn't have children as yet. Mama loved him her whole life. She didn't love papa.

Two or three years later mama had a baby boy, born in winter. There was a lot of snow and snowstorms. Grandmother Sura could not even visit mama. Mama wanted to name the boy David after her father, but papa wanted to name him Gedalie after his father. He said: 'Your mother didn't even come to the childbirth - we shall name him after my father'. Mama had a dream that night: a man in a hood, a very tall man, came into the room, approached her and began to throttle her. Mama screamed in Yiddish: 'Don't throttle me, I am giving names'. Next day the boy felt ill and died. This is what mama told me.

Growing up

I was born in 1935. I was named Tamara. Uncle Leib had a daughter. Her name was Tamara and she was a lot older than me. There is nobody left to ask, but I think we were both named after my maternal great grandmother Tema.

We lived in the very center of Floreshty. We had two rooms: papa's shop was in one room – he had 5 or 6 young employees and his clients visited him in his room. Papa made men's clothes. His employees were young Jewish men and women. We spoke Yiddish at home and Moldavian – with our neighbors. There were sewing machines and big coal-heated irons. There was also a stove in this room. It was stoked with husk. Remember the box filled with husk. We had a portable steel stove on four legs where mama must have cooked our food. There was a lid on top where mama roasted eggplants and paprika. Mama also baked chicken liver on live coals. The Jewish rules require having blood removed from meat, and mama baked it on oiled paper. We surely followed kashrut. There was a door to a big box room in the corner. Actually, there were two doors, probably for heating saving purposes. There was some space between the doors. I remember that when mama made cookies for Sabbath, I stole some to eat them in this space, so that mama didn't know. There was another big room, our bedroom. There was my parents' bed, my bed, but I don't remember where my older sister slept – probably on a little sofa.

There were two big stores across the street from our house: one was a fabric store owned by Dorfman, a Jew. There was an inn next to it owned by our landlord Turcan. Next to the inn was a photographer's house on one side, and on another side – Ivanikha's house. I can't remember whether this was her surname or whether her husband's name was Ivan, but I remember well that she had a nice big garden with beautiful flowers. I liked going there. Mama said I was a lovely child, and all neighbors liked me. Mama told me how Petru Turcan's daughters taught me walking in autumn. One girl held a bunch of grapes teasing me and another supported me on my back. At some instant she let me on my own and I walked. They ran to tell my mama: 'Your Tamara is walking' – 'How come? This can't be!' Mama ran outside to take a look and they showed her again. Then my father came home and we walked again. Well, I did eat lots of grapes then.

I was a lively child. Once I feel hitting my chin on a hot iron. I had a big burn. It was cold in winter. Mama wrapped me in warm clothes and allowed me to stand by the front door to breathe in fresh air. Chief of police was passing. Seeing my red chin he came to my mama and asked: 'What's the matter with your pretty girl? What's up with her chin?' Mama proudly told this story afterward: the very colonel, chief of police, came by asking about her daughter.

On Sabbath papa's room turned into a fancy room. The sewing machines were covered with white cloth. Mama covered the table with a white fancy tablecloth. On Sabbath and Jewish holidays we celebrated in this room. Papa went to the synagogue on Sabbath. When he returned home, we had dinner sitting at the festively served table. Mama always lit two candles. She also covered her head with a lace shawl and prayed.

I remember Pesach well. Everything was cleaned and polished and checked for chametz. All everyday crockery was taken to the box room and a big box with fancy crockery was taken out of there. I remember little glasses with little handles – keysale. I also remember a 'kara' for matzah to be hidden on the first seder. It was like a round pillowcase. I've never seen any again. It was made from red satin, trimmed with fringes and decorated with inscription in Yiddish. It also had a lining. Mama had it with us in evacuation. When we returned to Bessarabia, mama gave it to a rabbi from Beltsy. On Pesach mama made a pudding using her own recipe, on chicken fat adding chicken liver. I have dim memories about the first seder: we were dressed up and sat at the table. Papa sits at the short end of the table telling us about the Exodus of Jews from Egypt. The candles are burning, and there is a glass of wine for Elijah the Prophet on the table. The door is kept half-

open for him to come in. I cannot remember asking papa for kashes, perhaps, Sheiva did this, being older than me ...

I don't remember the Sukkot at all. On Simchat Torah we, kids, carried little flags with apples on them. Boys played with nuts with a board, from which the nuts slid hitting other nuts on the ground. The winner was the one who hit the most nuts.

On Chanukkah we played with a dreidel.- a whipping top. Also remember the Chanukkah gelt. I remember that my sister and I got coins and I was very proud of having my own money. Then Sheiva suggested that we changed our coins for a smaller change. Oh, how disappointed I was - Sheiva got more coins than I! How I cried, when I came home! How hurt I felt! Now I always give all my grandchildren the same amounts on Chanukkah.

Mama made hamantashen on Purim. We took shelakhmones to our neighbors, and our neighbors brought us theirs. Our relatives from Rezina also sent us shelakhmones. On the last Purim before the Great Patriotic War [1941], we received a parcel from uncle Leib and grandmother Sura with oranges, fluden, hamantashen and handmade lace for my mother, my sister and me. Mama made us dresses and nightgowns. I had lace with one rim, mama - with three and my sister Sheiva - with two rims. Purim was a joyful and noisy holiday. Boys ran around with rattles - gregor. I also remember papa's apprentices making a performance for us once. Mama didn't want to let them in, because I was too young, but my sister and I convinced her to let them in. They were a merry bunch wearing masks and fur jackets turned upside down. I burst into tears and couldn't compose myself till they took off their masks and I saw familiar faces. Then I joined their dancing and singing.

Another bright childhood memory. Mama's niece Gitl, the daughter of her stepsister Leika, was getting married in Kipercheny in the middle of a winter. There snowdrifts on the ground, but my parents decided to go to the wedding - they just couldn't miss it. Sheiva and I went with them. Also mama cousin sister's family of the Roitmans was with us. They also lived in Floreshty. We got lost on the way. The Moldavian cabmen went ahead trying to find the way. And they probably decided to scare a little these 'Jidani' [derogatory term for Jews in Romanian]. They turned their coats upside down and 'attacked' from a snowdrift. However, someone in our group guessed the trick and we had lots of fun instead of getting scared. It took us a lot of effort to get to Orgeyev and from there - to Kipercheny. We were 24 hours late and arrived on the second day of the wedding. We were served some wine, snacks and water, when all of a sudden I burst into tears: 'mama, this is no gas water, this is plain water'. Everybody felt confused.

During the war

In 1940 the Soviet power was established. At this moment papa was at the training in the Romanian army. Mama dressed me and Sheiva fancily and we went to the railway station to meet papa every day. When he arrived, he told mama that the Romanian military told them: 'Don't worry, we will be back a year from now'. Papa had education and was offered a position of director of the Center for domestic services. Papa went to work there. Mama turned his shop into a nice living room: she decorated it with carpets and nice curtains. Our neighbors came in to look at it, and the fabric store owner's wife used to say: 'Beila's home is more beautiful than mine'. In 1941 I turned 6 and boasted that I would go to the pre-school kindergarten. Sheiva studied at school and I

was awfully jealous. I couldn't wait till I went to school.

In summer the war began. Papa, mama, Sheiva and I evacuated. We had our bags of luggage with us and traveled on a freight train. When we were crossing the Dnestr, an air raid began. I remember well how the train operator tried to maneuver: forward-backward, forward-backward ... Mama covered Sheiva and me with blankets. It was light, though it was already evening. We arrived at Rybnitsa on the opposite bank. Mama said her sister Riva lived here whom she hadn't seen since 1918, but the train passed without stopping. We arrived at Krasnodar. From there we were taken to the kolkhoz [4](#) 'Verniy put' [The right way] in Kropotkin district by truck. Mama's niece Zhenia and her daughter Dora were with us, but I don't remember, when they joined us. A beautiful young Russian woman, whose husband, a lieutenant, was at the front, took us to her house. She had no children. Mama went to work in the field. On the first day she burnt her hands in the sun and they were covered with blisters. She had a short-sleeved dress on. Papa went to work as a shepherd. I walked about the village looking for mama. Some drivers gave me a lift and then I could go back, if I felt like having a ride or a drive. I was pretty and plump and everybody liked me. I also remember the kittens that our landlady drowned in a bucket of water. I don't remember whether I cried or not, but I could never forget this. Sheiva studied at school. She had a topographic map where she marked the frontline.

Few months later Germans approached the Krasnodar Kray [Russian administrative division]. Chairman of the kolkhoz told us: 'You've got to leave. Germans are close, and you are Jews'. They gave us wagons and we rode to Krasnodar. From there we took a freight train to Makhachkala. We were to cross the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk. There were crowds of people. We were accommodated in a hostel where we met mama's sister Sonia Gandelman and her daughter Haya. One night militia came to check our documents. They took papa with them. Later mama got to know that he was charged of deserting: he was supposed to obtain a necessary military permit in Krasnodar.

At that time we moved to another hostel since where we stayed was overcrowded. Sheiva and Haya were taken to another hostel and I stayed to watch out belongings. Mama and aunt Sonia were taking the luggage to the new hostel. I remember the corridor: there was an old woman lying on chairs, some other people and there was me watching our things. A man approached me and said in Yiddish: 'Your mama sent me to take up your luggage'. I said: 'Go ahead'. He took two bags, gave one to his companion and they left. When mama returned, I already realized what happened and ran toward her: 'Mama, did you send somebody to pick up the bags? - I didn't'. Mama began to scream and cry. There were our warm clothes in these bags. A militiaman came in, mama went to his office with him and made a list of our belongings. Mama and aunt Sonia cried all night through. Next morning she went to the militia office. They ushered her to a big room where there were heaps of clothes: 'Take yours from out there'. She found our clothes. The militia happened to follow these thieves for a while. However, our documents were gone. I had a new birth certificate issued for me, but they wrote that I was born in 1933 instead of 1935.

Mama said we would not leave Makhachkala till she found out what happened to papa. Aunt Sonia and she rented a room and mama went to work to support us. We stayed there 5-6 months. Mama was trying to find out what happened to papa. Later she was told he was to be under trial as an 'enemy of the people' [5](#). Papa was to be tried by the military tribunal. Mama managed to get to the court building. When papa came out of the building he managed to tell her in Yiddish: 'Take care of

the children. I am finished'. He gave her his watch and some money he had with him. Papa was sentenced to eight years, but I don't know whether he had to serve his sentence in jail or in a camp. He was sent to Nizhniy Tagil. This was the last time we saw papa.

Mama and aunt Sonia worked at a factory. It was getting colder. Sheiva got pneumonia. She was 12 years old and she died. Makhachkala was a horrific town. I lost my father and my older sister there. Two years later Sonia's daughter Haya fell ill and died, too. Later mama found out that the climate in Makhachkala was particularly hazardous for children: there were over a thousand evacuated children were buried in a short time. Some people told my mama: 'If you have children, you have to leave this town'. Mama, aunt Sonia and I headed to Baku [Azerbaijan] to proceed to Krasnovodsk from there. There were thousands of evacuated people in Baku. There were people everywhere in the vicinity of the port in Baku, it was like on a big beach in Odessa. One night during an air raid there were searchlights turned on to blind the pilots. It became as light as day. We buried ourselves in the sand, so scared we were. I've never again saw anything like that in my life. It was autumn, but it was terribly hot. Mama took her wedding watch and some more things and she and aunt Sonia went to the town to exchange them for some food. Mama came to a watch shop where the repair man said to her: 'Your watch needs to be repaired. Come back tomorrow'. When mama came back, this man pretended he had never seen her. So they took away mama's watch. However, mama managed to sell a beautiful Moldavian carpet for one hundred rubles and three loaves of bread. It was hard to get water: mama sent me to nearby houses where they poured me a little water and I paid them. We finally took a boat to Krasnovodsk. From there we moved to Bukhara where Sonia husband's brother Moisha Gandelman, his wife Fania and their son Buma had evacuated.

We went by train, but I don't remember the trip. In Bukhara we settled down near the Gandelmans. Moisha was a tinsmith, Fania was a housewife. My mama went to work at the knitwear factory. We lived in a small room that we rented from an Uzbek family. There was a bed on bricks, there was a box full of dried apricots and a little table on shaky legs. There was a niche in the wall where we kept our clothes. Mama didn't send me to school: I was to watch our belongings, but I think mama was reluctant to let me out of the house after the loss of her husband and daughter. I was her only treasure. I occasionally visited the Gandelmans. Fania was giving Buma bread with a butter persuading him: 'Have another bite for papa, one more for mama'. Once somebody called Fania, I grabbed one slice, and ate it later. I was very young, it was hard for me to stay alone and I asked mama to bring me some color pieces of cloth to play with them. She decided to bring me a cuff from a sweater. She had it on her wrist - workers wore long gauze sleeves to protect their arms from the heat. Mama was halted at the check point. They told her to come and see her boss next morning. Mama came home in tears. She and aunt Sonia began to sort out my clothes. Mama was afraid that she might be arrested and wanted to have everything prepared for me to stay with aunt Sonia. She didn't hope she would keep her freedom. However, next day she returned home. She wasn't arrested, but she lost her job. She went to work in a tailor's shop. She was good at making trousers. She used to help papa. I don't remember any Jewish traditions in Bukhara. Not once did I see matzah there. Cannot say whether mama fasted on Yom Kippur. We starved all the time there.

I was left alone in the room. I entertained myself moving the 'furniture': I put the box with dried apricots where the 'table' was, and moved the table to the center of the room. Our neighbors were Jewish families from Minsk, there was one Jew from the former territory of Poland [Annexation of

Eastern Poland] [6](#), there were many Jews. They came to see me: ‘How have you shuffled the furniture this time?’ Aunt Sonia moved to her husband in the Ural. We didn’t hear from papa. Mama had a yellowed paper where the word Nizhniy Tagil: this was the only document associated with my father. Mama worked in the shop few years. I was 9 years old (12 according to my new birth certificate), and I asked my mother to let me go to school. In September 1944 I went to the first form of a Russian school for girls. I could speak Uzbek by that time, and I didn’t have any problems with picking Russian. I studied well. I remember my first teacher Valentina Sergejevna: she was plumpish, very kind and nice. Though I was already nine years old, I was very tiny and mama even thought I might be a Lilliputian.

In spring 1944 Soviet troops began to liberate Bessarabia. There were many Jews from Bessarabia in Bukhara. Rezina sent a letter to Bukhara addressed to ‘Jews from Bessarabia’ calling them to come back to Bessarabia. The letter was signed by chief of the passport office Tamara Trostianetskaya, mama brother Leib’s daughter. Mama wrote Tamara. In her reply letter Tamara wrote that Leib and his family, grandmother with Keila’s family and Golda were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa. In late 1941 grandmother and Golda and Keila's family were moved to Transnistria [7](#) along with a big group of other Jewish inmates. On their way there, in Gvozdavka [Odessa region], they were shot – about 500 people perished there. Uncle Leib and his children stayed in Rybnitsa and survived. Tamara wrote she would send us a permit to go back to Kishinev as soon as it was liberated. When mama heard that Kishinev was liberated, she said: ‘They’ve sent us the permit’. This was true – we received it two weeks later. During this time Jews from Bessarabia – most of them were doctors, arranged for two railcars to take us back home. Mama managed to make arrangements for us to go with the rest of them, though she had to pay that person, who could organize for us to take this train. These were freight railcars that on our way were attached to various locomotives moving to the west.

On the way somebody mentioned that it was a good idea to buy salt in Central Asia to sell it to the benefit in Kharkov. Mama bought a bucket of salt. When we were approaching Ukraine, mama and our co-passenger got off the train to get food cards by which we could get bread and some food at railway stations. They missed the train. Can you imagine the horror my mother felt considering that I was the only one she had in the whole world? Two days later we arrived in Kharkov. People were selling salt and somebody turned to me: ‘Tamara, you’ve got salt?’ They helped me to sell my salt. Our train stopped at the freight station and mama and her companion found me there. She walked over a pedestrian bridge over the railroad track – there were thousands railcars around, and mama was trying to find me. Somehow she said to her companion: ‘I’ll find my Tamara here’. And she saw me, when I was stepping out the railcar. She ran towards me. Somebody said: ‘Tamara, look who is here.’ This was my mama!

We finally arrived in Kishinev. There was a sanitary check point in the vicinity of the railway station. We gave our clothes for disinfection and received a bar of coal-tar soap. We washed away all lice: we had been in freight railcars for over two weeks, and mama and I had thick long hair. Kishinev was ruined: no trams, no cars, we could only ride on ‘caruta’ [Romanian for horse cart]. Mama went to the market trying to find a wagon to Rezina. One man, chief of a poultry farm in Rybnitsa, agreed to give us a ride to Rezina. We rode via Orgeyev and stayed overnight in Kipercheny. In Rezina uncle Leib and his daughters Tamara, Pesia, Gitl, Haika and Sosia met us. Sosia was with her husband, the rest of them were single. They lived in their prewar house. They gave us a warm

welcome and invited us to stay with them. Mama said: 'I'll go to Rybnitsa to see Riva and then I'll decide where we will stay'. Aunt Riva and her husband also gave us a warm welcome and convinced mama to stay with them. Mama also went to Floreshty to take a look at our house. She needed a sewing machine. There was nobody left there - our former landlords Turcans had moved to Romania. This was the last time I visited Floreshty. Mama went to work at the tailor's shop. At that time mama met a man, (or did it happen in Bukhara?) he was in jail with papa in Nizhniy Tagil. He said they released papa after they finished their investigation of his case, but papa fell ill with dysentery and died in 1942. In 1945 mama was 40 and she was very attractive. Our relatives began to look for a match for her.

They arranged for mama to meet Shabs Uchitel from Rybnitsa. At the beginning of the war Shabs, his wife and their sons Senia and Boria were taken to the ghetto. Later they were taken to the terrible camp in Varvarovka [Nikolayev region, in Transnistria]. They escaped one night from there. Guards with dogs were chasing after them. They managed to get to Moldavia where a Moldavian family gave them shelter some place in the vicinity of Rybnitsa. Then they returned to the ghetto on their own. Every morning inmates of the ghetto lined up to go to work: those who had a craft, stood on one side and those who didn't - on another. Shabs was a hat maker, but when he stood in the group of hat makers, they told him: 'You go away, you are no hat maker', there were such rascals there. When the Soviet troops liberated Rybnitsa, Boria and Senia were taken to the army. Boria was wounded and taken to the hospital. When Shabs' wife heard that her son was wounded, her heart failed her - she suffered from heart problems - and she died.

After the war

Mama and Shabs got married in 1945. Few years later Shabs adopted me, and I adopted his surname - Uchitel. He was good to me, but if this happened now, I would rather keep my father's surname. We rented an apartment. We were poor, but mama tried to observe Jewish traditions. Mama's relatives joined us on Pesach. I remember the first Pesach celebrations in Rybnitsa were interesting. Mama had special crockery for Pesach. She had her own recipe to make keyzele. She made matzah observing the proportion between flour and water. Two-three women got together to make matzah at home. Later the synagogue began to make matzah and mama made an order for matzah in January. There is a mourning day before Rosh Hashanah. Mama went to the grave of her father David Trostianetskiy in Rezina on this day. Mama fasted on Yom Kippur.

I went to the second form at school, but I didn't know or understand anything. A week later I was assigned to the first form where there were other overgrown children studying, according to my birth certificate, I was born in 1933. I remember that my classmates were big boys and girls. I was the youngest and the tiniest one. I was told to sit at the first desk. We were studying multiplication by 'three' and the teacher asked: 'How much is 3 multiplied by 5?' I raised my hand and said: '3 x 5 is 15, and 15 divided by 5 is 3'. 'Look, a little body often harbors a great soul!' - somebody exclaimed from the rear. So I excelled at the very beginning. Later bigger children went to study in an evening school [secondary schools for working young people in the USSR]. I caught up other children in my class soon. I studied well. I was particularly good at mathematic. I also attended an embroidery and a dancing groups in the house of pioneers [pioneer club]. I liked dancing. I took an active part in school activities. I was a member of the students' committee at school. I remember that we listened to the pupils who had bad marks. My schoolmate Vilka Kogan (a Jewish boy), whose father was director of a plant, had all bad marks. I remember having a strong position

against him: 'Let's vote to expel him from school! Why making so much fuss about him?' Then I joined Komsomol [8](#). At first our school committee admitted me and then, when it was time to go to district committee, I got scared all of a sudden: 'I don't know much. I lack education'. And I ran away from there. Later they admitted me anyway. I finished the 7th form, when Senia Uchitel, my stepfather's younger son, returned to Rybnitsa. He was to get married in autumn. I didn't have a dress to wear at his wedding and I decided: 'I shall enter a medical school, receive my first stipend and have a new dress made for me'. [students of higher educational institutions and vocational schools received monthly stipends in the USSR]. Of course, this was a very 'reasonable' idea!

When I picked my documents from the school, our teacher of mathematics came to see my mama: 'Tamara is very good at mathematics, the best of all in her class, don't do this', but I was so eager to go to the medical school that mama decided to leave things as they were. I entered the medical school, but later I cried for three years, because my classmates went to the eighth form. I said they would finish school and enter colleges, and I will be a medical nurse for the rest of my life and would be taking out the night pots. However, I liked studying there and was good at practical trainings, but still, I felt hurt - why did I have to be a medical nurse? I cried a lot. Mama and my stepfather could not afford to support me. My stepfather retired, mama received 250-300 rubles in old currency [Tamara means the monetary reform in 1961, denomination of the ruble in the USSR]. Mama began to feed pigs to sell pork to save money for a new house. She managed to buy a small house.

At school I made friends with Yeva Tsatsa. Yeva and her family were in the ghetto in Rybnitsa during the war. Her father was an invalid, and her mother was making some wadded robes. While I had some kind of a coat before the war, but Yeva wore a 'fufaika' jacket [a dark cotton wool wadded jacket]. They were very poor. However, during our third year at school Yeva and I managed to get some new clothes for the stipend that we received. Yeva's surname now is Swartzman, she lives in Israel. We are still friends with her.

I was hysterical, when Stalin died in 1953. Of course, I thought of Stalin like the majority of our people at that time. Our father! Soldiers went into attacks with his name, and we won! In our family we didn't know anything about what was happening in 1937 [Great Terror] [9](#). My relatives were craftspeople, far from politics. I believed that what had happened to my father was a tragic mistake. On that day I was walking to school tear-stained, when I bumped into Yeva's mother. She got so concerned about me. She came to our school and called Yeva: 'What happened to Tamara?' Yeva said: 'Stalin died'. But I need to confess - there was something else that upset me so. According to the Jewish calendar, I was born on the eve of Purim. One time the Purim occurred on 6 March and since then the family had celebrated my birthday on 6 March. Stalin died on 5 March, and this day was announced as the day of the mourning in the country. And I started crying on the early morning of 6 March: 'I am so miserable, I will never again have a birthday, and the mourning will never end in my life, terrible, it's a nightmare!' Mama showed me my birth-certificate which stated that I was born on 10 February. Since 1953 I've celebrated my birthday on 10 February.

I finished my school with honors. Yeva and I received job assignments [10](#) in Teleneshty. We went to Teleneshty. All of a sudden I receive a cable from home: 'come home immediately - you have to go to Kishinev'. One of my co-graduates, Galina, a Moldavian girl, she also finished the school with honors, found out that graduates with all excellent marks were admitted to the Medical College without exams. Galina went to the ministry [Ministry of secondary and higher education of

Moldavia] and obtained a request for two people. She and I collected all necessary documents in one day. Next morning we hailed a truck hauling some food products to Kishinev. We submitted our documents and were admitted to the Pediatric Faculty of Medical College. When we returned to Rybnitsa there was a buzz around the town: 'Tamara's mama paid 25 thousand for Tamara's admission!' This was 1954. This was the first postwar graduation in Rybnitsa. Only three other graduates, besides me, entered colleges. They had finished our school with medals [The highest honors of school-leavers in USSR].

All I had to make my living was my stipend. Occasionally mama sent me jam that was actually my basic food. One of my senior co-students used to say: 'Tamara, you won't last long on jam'. I had to spend many hours studying in college. It was easier a little with special subjects that I studied at the school, like anatomy, but I had to spend more time studying general subjects, like physics and chemistry. I had particularly big problems with physical culture. My teacher was a 'fascist'. He forced me to pass some sports standards to him after I had passed all of my exams and credits in the main subjects. Probably I already had poor lungs then since I just failed to follow the standard requirements in physical culture. I never missed one physical culture class through four years in college. This Fyodor Fyodorovich gave me my credit. Anyway, this was wonderful time and I enjoyed studying in my college. I lived in the hostel and was an active Komsomol member.

During the period of the 'doctors' plot' [11](#) I was just a girl and didn't understand much, but when it came to the 20th Congress [12](#) in 1956, and they published Khrushchev's [13](#) speech denouncing all Stalin's deeds, I was shocked. However, I was still actively involved in the Komsomol activities. I went to work at the virgin lands twice: in 1955, after my second year in college, and in 1956 - after the third year. [In 1954-1960 Khrushchev's Virgin Lands program began - the intensive irrigation of the Kazakh steppe, Siberia, the Ural and the Volga region to develop agriculture. 41.8 million hectares of land were newly ploughed. Komsomol members took an active part in this work.] When there was the popular in those times song 'Zdravstvuy zemlia tselinaya' [Hello Virgin Land] on radio - my mama used to cry, when she heard the words of this song, her heart was tearing apart. We went to the Pavlodar and Petropavlovsk regions in Kazakhstan. We worked hard there. We worked at the grain elevator constructing the grain dryer. I was a group supervisor in our crew. Young workers often cursed there. We, girls, tried to teach them better: 'If you curse, we won't work with you'. They promised to improve, but then failed again, cursing, when running out of the mortar, or bricks... They came to apologize: «'But, girls, we are not to blame, our tongues just slip, we don't even follow..' But we actually heard the real curse language, when Vasia, a 60-year old man, old and thin, came. He spoke such dirty language that we could not bear to hear it. We fought one day, then another, and he didn't come to work on the third day. He said to his crew leader: 'I cannot work with those girls. They will put send me to prison'.

In the evening we arranged dancing parties with local girls and boys. We particularly liked Sasha Dubrovskiy, a local boy. After finishing the 10th form he went to work at the truck shop. His father helped him to get this job. This shop sold soap, toothpaste, tinned food, stationary, envelopes, all kinds of small items. Sasha also brought us our mail from the post office. In the evening he came there with his friend, who played the accordion, and we danced. There was a popular song 'Moscow evenings' and we sang 'Kishinev evenings', and the locals sang 'Kazakh evenings'. We occasionally received parcels with fruit from Moldavia. Sasha was born and grew up in Kazakhstan and had never tried pears. The girls decided: if one of us received pears, we would give them to Sasha.

Somebody received two pears and we gave them to Sasha to try.

Once one of our girls felt severely ill, and I accompanied her to Pavlodar. I took her to her train and went to the market where they sold grapes – 25 rubles per kilo. I asked 200 grams, gave the vendor 5 rubles and she gave me 20 kopeck change. I wore a cotton wool jacket and tarpaulin boots like all virgin land workers. I took this bunch of grapes and threw away few rotten grapes. The vendor looked at me and said: Girl, where do you come from that you eat grapes like this?' I replied: 'Two weeks from now I will buy two kilos for 5 rubles, 2.40 rubles per kilo, and will get 20 kopeck change. – Ah, I see'. After my first time in the virgin lands I was awarded a badge, an official one, with a certificate and I have a medal for the second year – 'For opening up the virgin lands'. I bought a coat for the money I earned during the second trip there.

When I was the 5th-year student mama sent me a parcel and 100 rubles from Rybnitsa. Monia Koblik from Rybnitsa, who came to Kishinev to buy some medications for his mother, delivered the parcel to me. I knew, who he was: in Rybnitsa people knew each other. Monia graduated from technical College in Odessa, specialization in refrigerators. All of a sudden he suggested: 'Let's meet in the evening!' We did. He bought tickets to the Russian theater. In the morning he had to go back to Rybnitsa. It was his vacation. He said before saying 'good bye' to me: 'I will come back in two weeks. Let's do the same program'. We began to see each other. My mother said to me right away: 'Don't be a fool. He is a good guy and comes from a nice Jewish family'. My mother was concerned that I would jump into a marriage and give up my studies from the very beginning, and she was also afraid that I might marry a Russian guy. Later, when I was in the third, fourth and fifth year in college, she began to worry that I might remain single: all girls were getting married, but not me. She even cried at night. She worked near the church in Rybnitsa and told me afterward: 'Every time there was a church wedding I cried, because my daughter was not getting married'. I was just looking around: this guy was not good for me, and that one didn't suit me.

My husband Monia Koblik was born in Rashkov in 1928. Before the war the family moved to Rybnitsa. His father David Koblik was director of a store. His mother Etia Koblik was a housewife. His mother was a nice lady. He has an older brother – his name is Mikhail, and a younger sister – her name is Fania. During the great Patriotic War they evacuated to Kazakhstan. His father died there in 1942. After the war they lived in Rybnitsa. Mikhail worked as an accountant. His wife Mania was a teacher. He has two children: Galina and David. Fania was a chemical engineer. Her husband Valeriy Lastov was chairman of the Jewish community in Rybnitsa. They have two daughters: Irina and Mila. They live in Beer Sheva in Israel. The house where Valeriy and Fania lived in Rybnitsa is a community house named 'Rachel' after Valeriy's mother.

We got married in Kishinev on 25 April 1959, when I was finishing the 5th year in college. On this day four of my co-students had their marriage registered. My group came to the registry office. This was at the time of a lecture in psychiatry that we all missed. After the civil ceremony we made a party for our friends in Kishinev, but we had a big wedding in Rybnitsa on 2 May. My relatives, and of course, my mother's older brother Leib from Rezina came to the wedding. Mama wanted me to have a chuppah, but I was a Komsomol member, an activist, and a member of the Komsomol committee of my course in college. I said: 'No chuppah!' Mama took quite an effort to convince me: 'Uncle Leib says he has never seen a Jewish wedding without a chuppah'. I was inexorable: «Then let him leave!' Mama didn't tell him what I said, of course, but what was I to do? All in all, there was no chuppah, but as for the rest of it, it was a beautiful Jewish wedding.

There were more than 100 guests, and a good orchestra. The guests danced and had fun: we arranged the wedding party in the firefighters' office in Rybnitsa.

After the wedding we lived in Kishinev. We rented an apartment and paid for the whole year from the amount that we were given at the wedding. I got pregnant at once. I was 25 and being a doctor I knew this was about the time I had a baby. For me having children was more important than getting married: we often talked with my co-students that we would have children even if we never married. In winter I was already in the 6th month of pregnancy, I was having practical classes in the hospital in Rybnitsa. This was a big hospital. Once our chief doctor Zonis, a Jew, invited me to his office: 'Tamara Alexandrovna, Polischuk failed to come to his night shift, so you will take it. Go take some rest at home, take our ambulance car, and it will pick you up to take here later'. I stayed overnight. I was afraid of night shifts - you never know what patients to expect. At night a young guy from a hostel was delivered from a hostel: he had high fever, a terribly red foot. I immediately diagnosed erysipelatos inflammation, had him taken to a box in the hospital. In the morning Zonis came to work: he was an infectiologist. This was a rare diagnosis and as hard to identify. He examined the patient and said at the morning meeting: 'A young doctor was on duty, she managed the situation well, diagnosed the disease, isolated the patient and prescribed the treatment correctly'. So he praised me. I worked in the hospital until the last day. I remember an old woman, a patient in the hospital, approached me. She didn't know I was having a practical training since we worked like real doctors: 'Doctor, dear, you are at work, when your belly has lowered'. On 16 March in Rybnitsa my older daughter Ella was born.

After the training I returned to Kishinev with my baby. At first Monia's sister Fania stayed with me to help around, then my mother stayed with me. I passed my state exams and obtained a diploma of a children's doctor. My husband worked in Odessa construction department. They were building the first 100T refrigerator in Kishinev. When the construction was over, he was offered to stay to supervise operation of this refrigerator since Moldavia didn't have any operations experts available. They promised him an apartment in Kishinev. The Minister of Meat and Dairy Industry of Moldavia wrote a letter to the Minister of Health. He wrote that since Monia Koblik was a highly qualified expert and Moldavia didn't have any refrigerator operations experts available, requesting to help his wife to find an employment. However, only a year later I was offered a position of a doctor in a kindergarten.

My husband did not receive an apartment right away either. We rented a room for 20 rubles per month, when his salary was - 90 rubles and we didn't have any other income. Life was hard, but we managed. When I went to work, I left Ella in a nursery school near where we lived. We actually lived in the 'Red corner room' of the meat factory, the room was 28 square meters in area. There was a stove to heat it, but the temperature never went above 14 degrees. Ella was often ill. In 1964, when I was pregnant again, we received a one-room apartment with all comforts. In 1962 my stepfather died in Rybnitsa. He was buried according to the Jewish ritual, in a takhrikhim, and mama invited a rabbi. I always recall Shabs with gratitude, he raised me, and gave me a chance to get education, he was a good father. Mama sold her house in Rybnitsa and moved in with us in 1964. In summer my second daughter Sopha was born. Two years later we received a big three-bedroom apartment in Zelinskogo Street. Ella went to a kindergarten, and Sopha was in a nursery school. After my maternity leave I didn't go back to my previous job. I wanted to work in a hospital. I went to work as a district doctor in Skulianka in the suburb of Kishinev. In any weather - in the

heat or cold, rain and thaw I had to make the rounds of my patients: I had up to 30 calls per day. To take a short cut, my accompanying nurse and I often went across the reed bushes on the edge of the suburb. There I had my first pulmonary hemorrhage in 1967. I managed to get closer to the road where some people found me. Later these hemorrhages repeated. I went to the Institute of pulmonology in Moscow to consult them. They didn't make the final diagnosis, but they ordered me to avoid exceeding cold or stress and take a mandatory rest in the south of the Crimea, when it's not too hot there [the Crimean climate is favorable for people with lung problems]. I was 32 years old, I had two small children, and my goal in life was to live as long as 50. I begged the Lord to let me lie till I turned 50 for my children to have no stepmother. We spent all our savings for the Crimea. I went to recreation homes each year, or my husband, my daughters and I went there and rented a room. I had to take up a less tiring job: and I went to lecture at Kishinev Medical School.

When Ella went to school, Sopha still went to the kindergarten, and then Sopha went to school. They both went to a nearby school. They studied well: they were neat and disciplined girls. I attended parents' meetings at school and spent time with the girls. They were sociable and had many friends of various nationalities. Like me, they never segregated people by their nationality. I enjoyed arranging my daughters' birthday parties. They invited their classmates and neighbors. Mama and I made cookies and cakes, bought sweets and fruit. There was particularly plenty of fruit on Sopha's birthday: she was born in summer, on 2 July. I made fruit cocktails for the children: these were the first cocktails in Kishinev, they were new to the people then. I asked Monia to buy me a mixer as an 8-March [Women's Day] present. I bought tall glasses for cocktails - Czech glasses with musketeers on them. Cocktails were the high spot of the parties: somebody wanted a pink one, another wanted an orange cocktail, with cherry jam or apricot jam. I enjoyed those celebrations no less than my daughters and their friends.

I also liked, when my friends visited me. We celebrated birthdays and Soviet holidays: 1 May, October holidays [October Revolution Day] [14](#) and New Year, of course. According to our family tradition, we also celebrated Jewish holidays. My mama, who lived in Kishinev then, went to the synagogue, and had a seat of her own there. Each Jew is accustomed to have his own seat. On Rosh Hashanah they bring money in 'schisl' [basin, Yiddish], and mama always made a contribution. On Yom Kippur she stayed at the synagogue a whole day fasting. My girls and I came to take her home from there. My girls recalled after she died: 'mama, do you remember how we accompanied grandma?' I remember the synagogue was always overcrowded, when we came for my mother, but after 1989 there were few Jews attending it - many Jews had moved to Israel. One couldn't fail to notice this. On Pesach mama bought a chicken at the market and took her to a shochet. She made a special liqueur and took out her Pesach crockery. She had a beautiful dish to serve pudding in it. On Chanukkah we gave Chanukkah gelt to our girls. I told them this childhood story of mine, when my sister and I got different coins. I always gave my daughters the same amount of money. On Purim mama and I made hamantashen. So my daughters knew all Jewish traditions.

In the 1970s, when Jews started moving to Israel, many of our relatives went there. My mother sister Sonia's niece Mania Duvidzon was one of the first ones to move there, her husband and aunt Sonia went with them. Leib's children moved to Israel: Itzyk-Moishe, Beila, Haika, Sosia, Gitl, Pesia and Tamara. Yasha, the youngest, moved to America. He lived in New York. Uncle Leib died in Rezina back in 1961. Aunt Riva died in the 1970s, and her sons Fima and David moved to Israel.

Her daughter Genia moved there in 1991. My mother's sister Leika, brother Isaac and many nephews and nieces were in Israel. Mama was eager to move there, but my husband and I decided against it since my daughters didn't want to go there. So, it never came to it with us.

Ella studied well, but she had stomach troubles, and after she finished the 8th form I decided it was not necessary for her to have a higher education. She was beautiful and charming and I thought it was not to be long before she got married. Ella entered the Accounting Faculty of the Industrial and Economic Technical School. After finishing it she went to work at the design institute of meat and dairy industry. She was a smart and industrious employee. She held the position of senior engineer, but she needed a higher education to keep it. So we decided: 'Ella, since you are not getting married, go to study'. She entered the Faculty of heating engineering of Dnepropetrovsk College of railroad transport. She studied by correspondence. 6 years later she defended her diploma brilliantly. She continued her work in the institute of meat and dairy industry. She was beautiful, she was smart, well educated, decent and neat. She had the reputation of the most educated girl at the institute, but she wasn't married.

Sopha finished the 10th form with honors in 1981. Her father decided she had to enter the Mechanical Faculty of the Agricultural College that was believed to be the most difficult in Kishinev. I accompanied her to the exam in physics. There were eight groups, 240 exam takers. She was the only girl in a crowd of strong guys. Most of them had served their term in the army. Sopha went to the exam in the group of the first 6 applicants. She came out an hour later: 'Four'. [here was a 5-point marking system in the USSR]. - Why 'four'? - Mama, there were five '2's before me'. She had '5's in the rest of her exams. Sopha enjoyed her studies and had no problems with them whatsoever. Her co-students often got together visiting her. From the very beginning I noticed Victor Klochko, a handsome Russian guy in their company, - he particularly cared about Sopha. They got married before they were to get their diplomas and moved to Sokoleny where they had their job assignments. In 1987 Sopha's daughter Yulia was born and they returned to Kishinev.

In 1988 I retired after turning 55 according to my documents [women retired at 55 in the USSR]. I continued to lecture part-time in the school and also worked as a tourist guide. In summer and winter vacations I guided tourists to different towns in the USSR. So I visited Kiev, Leningrad, Crimea and the Carpathians. I enjoyed being a pensioner, when in 1989 doctors diagnosed a terrible disease of my older daughter, she was 29. Three days later she had a surgery, and had two thirds of her stomach removed. The Professor told me everything was to be well, that there were no cancer cells left, but 29 years is the age, when things grow fast and I, being a doctor, realized how shaky the situation was.

Perestroika [15](#) began, the situation in the country was very unstable. I decided I had to take Ella to Israel to rescue her, but in early 1990 my mama fell severely ill. She died in July at the age of 83. Mama was buried in the Doina [cemetery in Kishinev], in the Jewish section of it. We observed the Jewish ritual. I invited a man from the synagogue, my relatives arrived from Rybnitsa, whoever stayed in Moldavia. The man from the synagogue had a beautiful service for mama. Mama was covered with a ritual cover that he took with him after the service. Then we sat Shivah for 7 days. Everything was arranged in the Jewish manner.

That year, when mama died, on Rosh Hashanah I said: I will do Rosh Hashanah and Pesach like mama did'. On Pesach I bought a chicken for 45 rubles at the market - this was a lot of money

then! – and went to the shochet at the synagogue. There was a line for matzah at the synagogue. I was pressed for time, I had to go to my class at school. I asked him: ‘Please slaughter my chicken, I’ve got to go, you know, I have no time’. There was a long line, and he was the only one to serve them. I shouted: ‘You know, I cannot wait here, there are thirty people waiting for me at the lecture, I am going home!’ I couldn’t possibly be late and tell my students that I had been at the synagogue to have my chicken slaughtered. The shochet apologized to the others, went to his room where he slaughtered my chicken. So, I made everything like mama for Pesach: keyzele, mendele, everything according to the rules. Since then I’ve always done what is required. My grandson Maxim also loves this holiday. When he visited me on the new year when he was small, he asked: «Grandma, will there be candles lit tonight?’ explained to him that this was not a specifically Jewish holiday, but a general one, for all people.

In 1991 my husband, Ella and I moved to Israel. We stayed in Rehovot and went to study Ivrit in an ulpan. Then I had to take an exam to obtain a license to work as a doctor since I was 58 [in Israel women retire at 60]. Our professors of Israel were my examiners. I had to take the exam in Hebrew. I answered their questions and passed the exam successfully and obtained the ‘rishayon’ – a permit (in Ivrit). At this very time my husband and I were offered a job of taking care of two old people having marasmus. We were to stay in Tel Aviv. Their sons, very wealthy people, invited us for an interview and I agreed to work one month for them. Later they sent their old folks to an elderly people’s home, but one month later one of the sons called me: ‘Please come back. Papa doesn’t want to be there. Papa is crying all the time’. My husband and I discussed this and returned to this job. We worked for them for two years.

We paid the rent for the apartment in Rehovot where Ella stayed. She felt worse or better, quit her job and found another, but she never had a job by her specialty. In January 1995 Ella had metastases growing. My husband and I returned to Rehovot. Ella had four surgeries. During this period I visited Kishinev where Sopha was to have another baby. In spring 1995 Sopha’s son Maxim was born. One week before my departure I broke the neck of femor – I was taken to Israel on stretches and had a surgery there. After recovery I looked after Ella and never left her again. Shortly before Ella died Sopha, Yulia and 8-months-old Maxim visited us in Israel. In January 1996 my Ella died. Of course, we buried her according to Jewish traditions. My daughter, and her two children and her husband were there. We sat Shivah. A year after Ella died we returned to our younger daughter in Kishinev. Every year I went to Ella’s grave in Israel. The person lives as long as he/she is remembered. When I went to Israel I called my relatives and 15-20 of them got together: relatives, friends and neighbors. We laid the table and recalled Ella. In 2002 I visited Israel for the last time. I was to go there in 2003, but I had an acute attack of cholelithiasis and I had a surgery. In 2004 had a surgery on my lungs at the oncological institute. I must go to my daughter. I haven’t been there for three years. I promised her to come there each year.

At first my daughter Sopha’s family was having a hard time after perestroika in the 1990s. Sopha grabbed any job she could: she knitted, looked after some children of the same age as Yulia and Maxim, picking them from school and helping them to do their homework until Sopha’s husband opened a small BMW repair shop. This is their family business. Sopha works there as an accountant and Victor sister’s husband helps with repairs. My granddaughter Yulia has finished school this year and will continue her studies. Maxim will go to the fourth form. My husband and I are very attached to them and they return our feelings. My grandchildren visit me on Jewish holidays and I

try to teach them what I know about Jewish traditions and the history of our family.

The Jewish life in Kishinev is very interesting now, as long as one gets involved in it. I attend many activities. Yesterday in the Jewish library we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the pensioners' club. We have gatherings each month in this club. We listen to lectures on the Jewish history and culture and concerts of amateur artists. On Jewish holidays we listen to the history of each holiday and a traditional meal is served: whether it is Pesach or Purim. Our women's club Hava also works in the library. This is a nice club – there are intellectuals there, of the same age, four-five doctors, and the rest of its members also have a higher education. We bring our treatments there: ice-cream and fruit. We agree in advance whatever each of us is bringing. Recently we had an interesting competition: 'my mama's dishes'. I made keyzele, a matzah pudding adding a little chicken fat and liver, like mama made it. I became a winner. We also have a Jewish Educational University [Community lecture course], working every second Sunday. 50-60 people attend it. We listen to great lectures on various subjects: music, literature, Jewish history and holidays. I am a permanent member of the Yiddish club. Ehil Schreibman, our classical writer of Kishinev, conducts it. He conducts classes in Yiddish. I know and love Yiddish, but there is nobody to talk to. The last time I spoke Yiddish was with my mama.

Hesed [16](#) Yehudah helps s a lot. We receive monthly food packages with chicken, cereals, sugar, tea, etc. They pay for our medications and occasionally give us clothes: I've got slippers and two sport suits from them. When I was in the hospital, the long-sleeved warm jacket from the suit happened to be very handy – it can be unzipped easily, which was particularly convenient when it was time to replace bandages. My former colleagues remember me. Recently director of the medical school where I taught brought me a huge bouquet of flowers and a gift on my jubilee.

Glossary

1 Bessarabia

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

2 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.

[3](#) Kishinev pogrom of 1903: On 6-7 April, during the Christian Orthodox Easter, there was severe

pogrom in Kishinev (today Chisinau, Moldova) and its suburbs, in which about 50 Jews were killed and hundreds injured. Jewish shops were destroyed and many people left homeless. The pogrom became a watershed in the history of the Jews of the Pale of Settlement and the Zionist movement, not only because of its scale, but also due to the reaction of the authorities, who either could not or did not want to stop the pogromists. The pogrom reverberated in the Jewish world and spurred many future Zionists to join the movement.

4 Kolkhoz: In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

5 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition

6 Annexation of Eastern Poland

According to a secret clause in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact defining Soviet and German territorial spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union occupied Eastern Poland in September 1939. In early November the newly annexed lands were divided up between the Ukrainian and the Belarusian Soviet Republics.

7 Transnistria

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

8 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.

9 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

10 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.

11 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.

12 Twentieth Party Congress

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

13 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

14 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.

15 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.

16 Hesed

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