

# Sarrah Muller

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Tatiana Chaika

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*Sarrah Muller lives with her daughter Inna Lisovaya's family in a three-bedroom apartment in Obolon, one of new districts in Kiev. Sarrah is a short thin woman with bright black eyes. She opens the door for me and tells me that she hasn't slept all night thinking about our meeting and her life. The apartment is full of light and cozy. There are Inna's pictures on the walls and the toys she's made on the bookshelves. Inna, a thin woman with big eyes is also present during our conversation and takes part in it. She adds to her mother's story and tells me a lot about herself and her father.*

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## **My family background**

My family came from Western Ukraine, the town of Kamenets-Podolskiy [about 400km from Kiev], an old town near the Romanian border. It's a small town that has developed at the interfaces between different cultures. It has been a multinational town and absorbed all these cultures. There was a Christian church, a Catholic church, a Greek and an Armenian churches in the Old Town near the building of the Town Hall with an old clock on it. There were also two synagogues in this spot - located across the street from one another: the synagogue of tailors and the synagogue of shoemakers. My maternal grandfather Avraam Melzer went to the big, beautiful, and decorated with old stained glass patterns, located on the steep bank of the Smotrich River, since his childhood. He was born to the family of a tailor in the 1860s and became a popular tailor in the town. His wife, my grandmother Sarrah, whose maiden name I don't know, was also born in Kamenets-Podolskiy around the same period as my grandfather. My grandmother was a housewife that was common for Jewish families. The Melzer house was in the lower town. This neighborhood was called Karavassary, the district of merchants, craftsmen and balagula cabmen. My grandfather was working from morning till night. My mother told me that he started his day from a morning prayer with his tallit and tefillin on and went to the synagogue. On Saturday and on holidays my grandmother and the children went with him.

My mother was the youngest in the Melzer family. Avraam and Sarrah Melzers had three sons and two girls besides her. They called my mother Tsina. Including her, there were six children in the family. The boys were given primary education and the girls had no education at all: my grandfather probably believed that the girls didn't need any education and that they only had to learn to be a good mother and housewife. My mother's older brothers Mordukhai and Benesh, born in the early 1880s, moved to America some time in 1901 or 1902, and there were no contacts with them afterward. Their third son Gedali was my grandfather's apprentice. When WWI began, and there were trains with the wounded military going through Kamenets-Podolskiy, Gedali, who was to be recruited to the army, lost his mind from fear that he might be one of them. Shortly afterward he died from mental illness in the hospital.

My mother's oldest sister Ita lived in Kamenets-Podolskiy. She and her husband Gershl Nudelman had ten children. Ita's oldest daughter Clara and middle daughter Tsyliya married military men who were on service in Makhachkala [today Dagestan Autonomous Republic within Russian Federation] in Central Asia. Clara married David Muhmacher and Tsyliya married Ziama Slutskiy. They and their sisters Braina and Sonia, who joined their sisters in Makhachkala at the very beginning of the Great Patriotic War [1](#) survived in the war. David and Ziama were at the front and returned home after the war. Tsyliya and her children and younger sisters Braina and Sonia were in evacuation in Stalinabad [today Dushanbe, Tajikistan]. After the war they returned to Makhachkala. Clara died from cancer in the early 1950s, her sisters passed away in the middle of the 1980s and Tsyliya died recently in Israel. Tsyliya's son Roman, born in the middle of the 1930s, lives in Moscow region. He has a Russian wife. Semyon, who was born with his twin-brother, lives in Voronezh. His twin brother died shortly after he was born in 1942. Only Ita of Clara's four children, born after the war and named after her grandmother, who had perished during the Holocaust, is living now. Ita's daughter Tuba (everybody called her Tania [2](#)) married a journalist from Birobidzhan [3](#). In June 1941 she came to Kamenets on vacation with her little son, when the Great Patriotic War began. Ita and her husband and Tuba and her son perished in the shooting of Jews in 1941. Ita's sons Isaac and Heva perished at the front. Only Ita's son Gershl returned from the war and lived in Voronezh.

My mother's younger sister Huva married a Romanian Jew in the early 1900s and moved to Romania. Her husband was a baker and owned a bakery. Before the Revolution of 1917 [4](#) my mother visited her sister in Romania several times. After the Civil War [5](#) Huva's family happened to be living abroad. This is all information we had about Huva. Most likely, they all perished during the Holocaust.

My mother Tsyna Melzer, the youngest in the family, was born in 1888. She didn't get any education and was helping her mother about the house since she was a child. In 1902 my mother also was about to leave her parents' home. Her fiancé, a Jew from Kamenets-Podolskiy, whose name I don't remember, had emigrated to America a year before and grew rich. He prepared all necessary documents for my mother to travel to America and even sent his people to meet her on the border. Everything was ready for their wedding on this distant continent, but grandmother Sarrah, who wanted to keep mother at home, said that if she left home, she would throw herself into a well. So, my mother daring not to disobey her parents refused her fiancé and stayed with grandfather and grandmother. In 1904 she married my papa.

My papa Avrum Halfin, born in 1887, arrived at Kamenets-Podoskiy from nearby Khotin. He was a hereditary baker – my grandfather Motl Halfin, who was the same age as my maternal grandfather,

owned a bakery in Khotin and provided well for his family and he believed himself to be a lord. He didn't work actually, letting his wife Haya and their sons to do all work. All day long he would have strolled around the synagogue wearing a three-piece suit and having his expensive stick in his hand. Motl greeted all Jewish passers-by and particularly tried to draw attention of wealthier Jews to his person. In the evening Motl made a summary of how many people he greeted during the day and who gave him what answer.

I don't know how my parents met, but there was no shadkhan involved. The Halfin's family was not happy with Avrum's choice. Of course, they were not: a rich son married a poor tailor's daughter. Their wedding took place in Kamenets-Podolskiy in 1904. Shortly after the marriage grandfather Motl left his family and moved to America where his traces disappeared. Grandmother Haya remarried and lived with her husband in a village near Kamenets-Podolskiy. My father kept out of touch with her without explaining the reasons, and this is all I know about her. All I know about my father's brothers and sisters is that four of them and their families perished during the Holocaust. Moisey, one of them, moved to Mexico in 1928 and also got lost.

My future parents settled down in Kamenets-Podolskiy with grandmother and grandfather Melzers. My father went to work in the bakery and soon became one of the best bakers in the town making the most delicious and puffy rolls. My father grew up in a religious family. He and my mother went to the synagogue of tailors, observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays.

In 1905 my parents' first baby – my sister Basia was born. After her my mother had miscarriages seven years in a row. Then, 8 years later, in 1913 my sister Ena was born and in 1915 – my brother Isaac. When WWI began, my father was recruited to Czarist army. He served for a short while before he was captured by Austrians. My father enjoyed telling about how kind the Austrians, whom he worked for, were. My father returned home in 1917. In 1919 a boy was born and in 1920 – a girl, but they died shortly after they were born. This was the hard period of the civil war and pogroms [6](#). My grandfather and grandmother Avraam and Sarrah Melzer perished in one of the biggest pogroms in early 1921. I don't know any details – it was hard for my mother to talk about it. When I was born in March 1921, I was named after my deceased grandmother Sarrah.

## **Growing up**

I was born in the midst of sorrow and devastation. In 1924, in the same month, when my older sister Basia married Bencion Vizrabin (she also had a Jewish wedding) my younger sister Fira was born. Basia had a rich wedding. My father's brothers from America sent a parcel with a wedding gown, a suit for the bridegroom and 100 dollars. This was the last time we heard from my father's brothers. In the following ten years everything happened as it should in an Orthodox Jewish family: my mother and her oldest daughter Basia were giving birth to babies. My mother had two girls and a boy, but they died in infancy, regrettably. Feiga, one of the girls, died after I dropped her incidentally. I suffered from guilt for many years, but my mother was calming me down saying that these kids were weak from birth and destined to die. Basia had four kids before the war.

My first childhood memories go back to our small two-bedroom apartment in the center of the town that we rented. Our family was very poor. One room was bigger, but the second one was dark and had no windows. The corridor served as a kitchen: there was a stove and a kerosene stove in it. In 1932 my sister Ena got married and her husband moved in with us. They lived in the dark room and we all plus their kids, who were born one after another, were gadding about in the bigger

room. We slept on big iron beds. My father slept on a narrow couch in the corridor. Besides the beds, there was a big dinner table and a wardrobe in the room. The room was decorated with paper napkins – there were particularly many of them on the bookstand with textbooks. There were also old Jewish books on the bookstand: Siddur, Talmud and maybe Tannakh that grandfather Avraam left. My father liked reading books in Hebrew in the evenings. We must have been very poor since only the older children had more or less decent clothes. As for the others, the only places where we were dressed decently were school and the synagogue. We went to the synagogue with our parents on holidays.

My favorite holidays in my childhood were Pesach and Chanukkah, when it was very beautiful at the synagogue. There was a cantor singing, and I always associated attending the synagogue with a holiday. However, we stopped going to the synagogue in 1927, when my father was admitted to the party as a representative of the poor proletariat and we could not go to the synagogue. However, our life did not improve. I remember being often hungry, though we always had enough bread to eat. Our family consisted of ten of us at that time. My mother put just a quarter of a chicken to make soup for the whole family and not a bit more. I remember how struck I was, when I visited my friend Elka and her parents gave her a quarter of a chicken and she didn't want it, and her parents gave her money to make her eat it. Elka's father Josef Lak wasn't a communist. He made work robes selling them in Kamenets-Podolskiy and neighboring towns, but they were much better off than we. However, at the end of NEP [7](#), in 1928, Josef had to give away everything he had and he himself was sent away from the town nobody knew where.

My father, being a young communist and a promoted worker, was appointed director of a dining room for workers. My father was very honest and even during famine in 1932-33 [8](#) he never ever brought anything home from his work. My mother begged him to bring at least soup leftovers, but he said that he wanted to sleep quietly and that he could not do any 'machinations'. His honesty was not appreciated at its true value. An audit discovered extra stocks and accused my father of theft and off-records of stocks. My father felt very hurt, threw his party membership card on their table and quit work. His party management came several times offering their apologies and asking him to resume his work, but he refused. My father became a baker and this probably rescued us during the famine. We always had bread and also helped my older sister Basia, aunt Ita and even any person, who came in to beg for food. I remember my mother giving bread to a man from the street, who cried and kissed her hands. I saw the man again that night – only he was dead lying not far from our house. Early in the morning a special crew picked the dead and drove them to the cemetery where they were buried in common graves – Jews and Christians.

After my father gave up his communist career, the family resumed observation of Jewish traditions. We went to the synagogue on holidays, celebrated Sabbath at home and my father read his religious books again. However, I never saw him praying at home. We didn't follow kashrut strictly either, though my mother or father never ate pork. As for the kids, we ate pork that our father's Christian colleagues treated us to since we rarely had meat at home. As for the Sabbath celebration, it went like this: we went to school on Friday and Saturday, but when we came home, we entered a different world. There were challit, kicheleh and many other delicious things on the table that we never had on weekdays. For Pesach we had special kosher crockery and ate many dishes from matzah. We didn't eat any bread through 8 days of the holiday. My father made ordinary and special egg matzah for the holiday and my mother made our favorite white cake. We

particularly liked Kicheleh with matzah and potatoes.

My first childhood friends were my cousin sisters, my mother sister Ita's children: Tania, Tsyliya and Zeldia. Zeldia, one of her ten children, was the closest to me, but she died in 1931. Ita and Gershl's family was even poorer than ours. Gershl was a harness maker. He also made leather sandals and his older children were assisting him. At first he obtained a license for this work, but when it turned out that he didn't make enough money to pay for the license, he decided to work without a license. One of their neighbors reported on them and a financial inspector [state officer responsible for identification of illegal businesses] fined Gershl, but since they had no money to pay the fine, they took away their belongings, which were few: all they had were iron beds with no bed sheets on them, a table and a bench and many pot plants. So they took these away. Gershl kept complaining saying that it was the Soviet power to blame and aunt Ita was calming him down pointing at their kids, who studied well, danced in a choreographic ensemble, and sang in the choir. She said it wasn't possible during the old regime, and by the way, she was right.

So, we kept discovering the world with Ita's children. We ran across the Old Town and knew it inside out, and also knew the old fortress in Kamenets. Residents of the town spoke Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Czech and Romanian, but we lived in the Jewish surrounding. I remember our janitor was Ukrainian. We only spoke Yiddish, and our non-Jewish friends also knew Yiddish.

All children in our family went to school. Isaac studied two years in a cheder and then went to the Jewish school. I went to the Jewish school in 10 minutes' walk from our home right by a Ukrainian school in 1928. It was an ordinary Soviet school, but we studied in Yiddish. We didn't have good practice in Russian and Ukrainian. I remember that our Russian teacher spoke Russian to us in our Russian classes and we replied in Yiddish. We had our textbooks in Yiddish. It was a secular school and we had no religious textbooks. I was the best pupil at school. I became a pioneer. During the period of famine pioneers went to gather spikelets and I was the best at gathering them. I was awarded a coat from a Joint [9](#) parcel. This was the first coat in my life. I had worn a thick woolen jacket that my mother knitted for me before.

Whatever poor we were we didn't lose hearts. My father became a pace maker at his work. He developed a practice of baking twice as much bread using the same quantity of fuel. He was elected to the district deputy council. I remember how proud I felt, when workers carried his portrait at a 1 May parade. However, my father never resumed his membership in the party.

I was an active pioneer and Komsomol [10](#) member. I was even elected secretary of the Komsomol unit of school. I was fond of literature, theater and signing. We studied Jewish writers and poets Sholom Aleichem [11](#), Perez Markish [12](#), Kvitko [13](#) at school. I was fortunate to have met these great people. When I was in the 5th form, I broke my leg sliding from a hill. After a surgery I got a free trip to the recreation center for the children of officials. They held me as an example at the recreation center, for I ate better than other children. There were other Jewish children there. I made friends with the daughter of the second secretary of the regional party committee (Kamenets was a regional town then) Tsyliya Galperina. After we returned home, I often visited her at home, and her parents allowed me to pick anything I wanted in their garden. In their house I met Kvitko and Markish, who came there on vacation. On the next day I brought my school friend Gershl Pilin to read them his poems and they enjoyed listening to him.

I loved theater. There was an amateur Jewish theater in Kamenets-Podolskiy. Young people of all nationalities staged Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian classics in the 'Sovrabotnik' [Soviet worker] club. Sholom Aleichem's 'Tevie the milkman' was the hit (my future second husband Wolf Muller and his brother Gershl also played in this theater). I watched their performances. I sang in the ensemble lead my Gurfinkel, a music teacher, in the club of the military unit deployed in the town. I had a very good voice, when I was young. There were three violinists, a pianist and a tambourine player in the orchestra: eight musicians from the military units, and we, 8 girls, sang. We mainly sang Jewish folk songs and Soviet Jewish patriotic songs. However, we had to attend rehearsals in secret to avoid Jewish scandal-mongers, who were not appreciative of young girls going to the military unit. The patriarchal standards of the town were very strong. However, I need to mention here that we really became friends with the military guys and they treated us with much respect.

In 1934 my brother Isaac moved to Birobidzhan, falling for the soviet propaganda in mass media and radio. They promised a lot, work and accommodation and provided traveling allowances to those, who agreed to go there. We didn't receive letters from Isaac for almost half year. My mother was concerned and cried at nights. Then my father told mother and us that he was going to work in Dunayevtsy, a neighboring town, and went to Birobidzhan in search of his son. He got a job there. He worked as baker in a recreation center for over a month, but he couldn't stay to live there: he was allergic to mosquitoes. My father went to Khabarovsk to go home from there. He spent all money he earned on medications and the trip. However, he bumped into Isaac in Khabarovsk. They returned home together and Isaac even had some money that he had earned with him. This was quite an event, when the family reunited. Isaac told us his bitter story about his hard life in Birobidzhan and that all those people, who went to live there, were actually told lies.

In 1936 I finished the 7th form and had to quit school to go to work to help my parents. My uncle helped me to become an apprentice in a bank and soon I became an operator there. However, I had to improve my Russian, I realized. I learned Russian and Ukrainian in a short time. In 1939 I was sent for training in Odessa [14](#), and after finishing this course of training I became an instructor. I worked in the bank till 1941. I became secretary of the Komsomol unit and took an active part in public activities.

This was the period of Stalin's arrests. My mother was very concerned about my father's experience in the dining room and about having relatives in America. My parents never discussed the situation in the country with us. We even didn't know that our distant relative became a victim during this period. My father's cousin brother Anatoliy Havkin, chief engineer of the Solikamsk plant, was arrested and sentenced to '10 years without the right to correspondence' that meant death sentence. His wife changed her surname back to her maiden's name and came to her homeland with her 8-year old son to avoid arrest. This boy had no idea what happened to his father. His mother just told him she had divorced him.

Many residents of Kamenets-Podolskiy were arrested. Some of them were accused of having been rich before the revolution, others - of ties with the Bund members [15](#) and Zionists [16](#), and somebody else of membership in Maccabi [17](#), the Zionist organization of young people in the town that existed in the 1920s. People went to sleep in fear that the 'Black Raven' ('Black Mary') [a special black car called 'Voron' - 'raven' in Russian, bringing trouble] would not miss their house that night. Fortunately, this disaster had no impact on our family.



I became very fond of cinema like many other young people. There was a big cinema theater named after Vuykov in our town, tickets cost 20 kopeck and we could afford to watch the movies that we liked 5-6 times. They were Soviet comedies 'Circus', 'Merry Guys' and others. There were also serious movies: 'Professor Mamlock' [18](#), a film about Nazis and Hitler's hatred of Jews. I remember how deeply impressed we were, though older people, who remembered WWI, used to say this was the Soviet propaganda and that Germans could not be what they were shown like in this movie. Our teacher of music Gurfinkel believed Germans to be a very cultured nation. In 1939, when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [19](#) was executed, the movies showing the truth about fascists disappeared from screens. Newspapers and radio talked about Hitler as a friend of the Soviet Union. This was at least strange, but at this young age I didn't give much thought to such serious things, though there were many things happening to give an impulse to consideration. When Poland was occupied by fascists from the west and Soviet troops from the east [20](#) many refugees were coming from there. They were Polish Jews mainly. They didn't know yet about future shootings of Jews and were escaping from Suppression: ghettos, barbed wire and a ban on trade. Many of these Jews settled down in Lvov [today Lviv, Ukraine], Lutsk, Rovno, and there were some in our town. Some Jews from western parts of Poland wanted to go back home - and were sent in the opposite direction - to Stalin's camps, to the gulag [21](#). The convoys of them passed Kamenets-Podolskiy and I can still remember trucks full of people with bags and packs. Many of them perished in the camps, and only during the war the Polish Government that escaped to London entered into an agreement with Stalin. The Polish survivors were released and formed the Polish army that was our ally in the war.

In 1940 I met David Herman, a young political officer of the Soviet army. David was born in our town in 1916. He finished the political School in Gorkiy, served in Western Ukraine and took part in the Finnish War [22](#). When the Finnish War was over, he came to his hometown on leave. I liked David very much, we began to see each other and he proposed to me. Our wedding took place in February 1941. I was the first one in our family to have no Jewish wedding. This was quite common at the time. Besides, my husband and I were convinced atheists, though we did have traditional Jewish food at the wedding party. Gurfinkel's orchestra played at the wedding.

I followed my husband to Lvov where he was on service. We lived in a small room in Grumbalsky Street. I liked Lvov, a cozy town with beautiful architecture. There was also sufficient Jewish population and a synagogue in Lvov. I particularly liked the Jewish theater that we visited several times. In May 1941 my husband was sent to Kiev and from there - to Starokonstantinov town in Vinnitsa region for the formation of tank units. I followed him to this town.

### **During the war**

There I was in Starokonstantinov, when the Great Patriotic War began. On the first day of the war my husband went to the front. We hardly had time to bid farewells and he apologized for being with me for such a short period of time. He also said that the tanks and other plant were relocated for repairs and they were going to the front with rifles and about 7 bullets each. Two days later I received a message from my husband. A first sergeant brought the note where my husband wrote that he hadn't had a baptism of fire yet and asked me to love him and wait for him. I took my husband's watch off my wrist and send it to him along with a note. This was the last time I heard from my husband. Much later, in 1944, I received a notification from a military registration office that my husband David Hermann disappeared on the first days of the war. He must have perished

shortly after we parted.

David's sister, a schoolgirl from Kamenets-Podolskiy, was visiting with us at this time. She asked me to send her home and I found a truck driving to Kamenets-Podolskiy to take her home. I also wanted to go there to evacuate with my parents and sisters. I had no doubts about evacuation, not only because I was a Jew, but also – because I was the wife of a political officer and a Komsomol member. However, like everybody else, I thought it wasn't going to be for long, a month or two at the maximum. One or two days after I sent my husband's sister to Kamenets-Podolskiy my younger sister Fira arrived. I didn't recognize her at once: a coal black girl approached me. It turned out my parents sent her for me and she traveled in a railcar with coal. Fira told me that our sisters' husbands Benjamin and Gershl went to the front. We failed to go to Kamenets-Podolskiy, though: there were no passenger trains going to the west, just military ones. So it happened that my parents and sisters stayed in the occupation: my parents, my sister Basia with her children Semyon, Israel, Sarrah and Shloime, sister Ena with her son and daughter Mania, my favorite, aunt Ita and uncle Gershl. My brother Isaac, who went to work in Grozny in 1939, was recruited to the army from there. Isaac perished on the first days of the war.

I evacuated in the train for the wives and children of officers of our unit. Fira was with me: I registered her as David's sister, or she wouldn't have been able to join me. We arrived at Troitsk town in Cheliabinsk region, 2500 km from home. The military registry office accommodated us in a room with six beds. There were four young women with no children sharing this room with us. I didn't have pillows or blankets with me. We stuffed the mattresses with grass and life went on. We shared food and cooked together. Some time later some women found their relatives and went to live with them and others moved to another town. Fira and I went to live with local Jews. There were only three Jewish families in this town before the war and local residents didn't know who Jews were. I went to work in a bank and later Komsomol authorities sent me to harvesting. We also worked in a hospital washing used gauze bandages. Later I went to work as a cashier in a shop where I worked till spring 1944. I faced clear anti-Semitism here for the first time in my life. My lady boss said she would be glad to exterminate all Jews, leaving me alone, though. She was good to me since I closed my eyes to her machinations. She was selling chocolate and butter that we received for children, took and gave bribes and made a fortune by the end of the war.

I sent Fira to a vocational school to study a profession. She was to become a communication operator, but instead, she got a job of an assembly mechanic of a freight train and according to the rules of the wartime she was considered liable to call up. He came to see me on weekends. I also met Jews from Kiev in Troitsk. Mostootriad, a bridge crew from Kiev with their chide Barenboim, a Jewish man, evacuated to Troitsk. I made friends with a Jewish woman who worked in the design office of this organization. We often discussed the news and our families in occupation. The first article of Erenburg [23](#) about atrocities of fascists was published and I understood that most likely, my dear ones were not among the living any longer.

My friends included me in the lists of Mostootriad employees, which enabled me to reevacuate to Kiev with them in March 1944. Fira was not allowed to quit her job and had to stay in Troitsk for this reason. I arrived in Kiev in April 1944. I stayed with some acquaintances in Gorky Street in Kiev. Kiev was bombed several times in April 1944.



In spring 1944 went to Babi Yar [24](#) with my landlords. They wanted to see where their relatives had been killed and I was drawn there irresistibly: I understood that my dear ones were lying in one of those ravines in Ukraine. We took a tram there. The slope of Babi Yar was covered with blooming trees – it was hard to believe there were thousands lying there. The ravine reminded of the tragedy: it was filled with concrete. Fascists wanted to eliminate the traces of their crimes incinerating the corpses and filling the pit with concrete. I was eager to go to my homeland. On 16 May 1945 I arrived at Kamenets-Podolskiy. According to local residents, during the first action in 1941 Ita, her husband and children, my sisters Basia and Ena with her son and little Manechka were killed. My father was to do the town maintenance work. He perished in spring 1942, during the second action. Our house was ruined. There were our belongings scattered on the ashes: remains of my mother’s favorite kerchief, sodden photographs. I picked them and took with me. Unfortunately, only few photographs could be saved. By that time I knew that Benjamin, Basia’s husband, and my brother Isaac perished at the front. Our teacher Gurfinkel, who never left Kamenets and his daughter, the violoncello player from the Philharmonic, also perished. Of all my classmates only four survived: I, another girl and two guys who were at the front. So I was there all by myself in 1944, a 23-year old widow.

### **After the war**

I stayed to live with a woman whom I knew in Kamenets before the war and went to work as an accountant. The postwar years, particularly 1946, were hard. He brightest memory was the execution of traitors and fascists in Kreshatik [Kreshatik is the main street of Kiev] after the trial in Kiev in spring 1946. There were thousands of people to watch the execution: 13 prisoners, sentenced to hanging, were standing by the gallows. It seemed strange to me that many people were crying, but probably this was a normal response to people’s suffering. One of prisoners resisted to fixing the loop on him. One of the executed fell from the gallows, though he was already dead. This was a horrifying view, but I knew that our people and I had reasons to take the revenge.

Anti-Semitism was strong in Kiev. There was a Jewish pogrom in 1946. The reason for it was a conflict between a Jewish man who had returned from the front and the Ukrainians who settled down in his apartment. They were abusing the man and he shot his offenders. He was arrested and sentenced to death. The funeral of those whom he killed grew into a march and its participants began to beat Jews. However, there was equestrian police watching the funeral and they held the march in check. The attitude toward Jews was getting worse and often during routinely conflicts one could hear regrets that not all Jews were killed in Babi Yar. Fortunately I was not alone at this hard time. In 1946 I was introduced to Wolf Muller from Kamenets-Podolskiy, whom I married soon. My husband’s story is worth hearing.

Wolf was born in Kamenets-Podolskiy in 1911. His family was miserably poor. Misfortunes were falling on them like from cornucopia. Wolf’s father Moshe Muller was an accountant, but only had occasional jobs. The family was so poor that the children dreamed of getting ill: when then fell ill, their parents bought milk for them. In 1920 Wolf’s mother, Miriam the beauty, died from typhus within few days. Wolf’s youngest sister Beba also died with her. There were four children left: Gershl, Grigoriy, my husband Wolf and their sister Fania, two years younger than Wolf. Moshe cared about his children and missed Miriam terribly. He was a very good father. Moshe’s sister, whose name was forgotten, took care of the orphans. Her husband had left for work in Poland many years before and stopped writing from there. The woman who didn’t speak Russian, Polish or

German went to look for her husband. She traveled across Poland and Germany before she got to England where she found her husband who had married another woman long before. She divorced him and returned to her town. She decided to dedicate herself to her brother's children. She made wigs for Jewish matrons and supported the family. However in due time ... Moshe remarried. His young wife's name was Miriam as well. The children's aunt got angry and talked to the children against the young stepmother. Grigoriy didn't like his stepmother and left his home at an early age. Wolf and Fania loved their stepmother with all their heart. They called her 'mother' and this was who she was for them. Wolf got two brothers: Shymon and Leizer, whom she had from Moshe. They were sweet, and Leizer, the youngest, was very handsome.

My husband's family was very religious. Wolf went to the synagogue with his father from early childhood. The children studied in cheder school and received Jewish education. Shymon and Leizer had a melamed to teach them at home since there were no melamed teachers in the Soviet time. Leizer, the younger boy, once began crossing himself pronouncing: 'Lord, give me mercy!' when he saw the melamed his teacher. He probably ran into a Christian church and saw people doing this. Melamed left the house hurriedly and this was the end of the children's religious education. Wolf studied at school a few years. When he turned 11, and the family was starving, he was sent to become an apprentice of confectioner Itzykovich. Probably Wolf had a talent to this vocation since he became a highly skilled confectioner. During the famine in 1933 Wolf actually rescued the whole family.

I remembered my husband: he and his brother Gershl actively participated in the Jewish theater that I ran to when a girl. Wolf and Gershl played in the theater and Gershl having an absolute ear for music, also worked as a prompter for touring theaters. Later Gershl moved to Kiev and Wolf followed him. During the war Wolf was recruited to the army, but since he had osseous tuberculosis he served in the headquarters of the South western Front for a year and a half and in the end of the war he worked in the labor army in a mine in Siberia from where he returned to Kiev. His father Moshe died shortly before the war. Gershl perished in Kiev at the very beginning of the war - he was a flak gunner. Shymon who had moved to Kiev in the late 1930s and was a cadet of the Kiev Artillery Military School, also perished in the first months of the war. Wolf's stepmother and Leizer also perished during mass shooting in Kamenets-Podolskiy. Leizer's Ukrainian friend offered him to escape, but Leizer didn't want to leave his mother. Fania who lived in Slavuta with her husband and children evacuated and survived. Her older daughter Mara died in evacuation, but her three other children managed.

Wolf and I had much in common: our hometown, and that we both lost our dear ones. Wolf was a beautiful, caring and kind man. About two months after we met I went to visit my only surviving relative - my father's cousin brother lawyer Lev Muller in Chernovtsy. Wolf followed me there soon and asked me to become his wife. We had our small wedding there as well.

In Kiev we settled down in the apartment that my husband lived in before the war - the one in Komintern Street. This was a communal apartment [25](#). We had a 16-square meter room and a corridor where we had a stove and a door to a neighbor's room. There was also exit to the yard. We had a big polished wardrobe that our daughters and their friends used to look at themselves as if in the mirror, a big table, a white plywood cupboard and a very beautiful nickel plated bed. Later, when we had children, my husband bought an old piano for the girls to study music. There was a carpet on the wall, which was posh for the time, and embroidered napkins on the bookshelves.

Fira visited us shortly after we got married. Fira married a Polish Jew and was going to Poland with him. She wanted us to go with them, but we refused. Fira left this man then and stayed in Kiev with us.

In 1947 my daughter Inna was born. I worked as an accountant in the voentorg [Editor's note: department responsible for food and commodity supplies to military units and organizations of the town], Wolf worked as a production engineer at the food preserve factory and in the early 1950s – at the town bakery factory. His was the period of state anti-Semitic campaigns and struggle against cosmopolites [26](#), and, unfortunately, our family didn't avoid them. During the period of the 'poisoning doctors' case [27](#), my husband replaced his colleague – pie shop superintendent at the factory. On this day the pies were not as good as usual. Some buyers began to shout against poisoning people (the fear of being poisoned was overwhelming then) and called the police. This ended in my husband's arrest, though he had nothing to do with this shop whatsoever. They puffed up a gigantic, so-called 'pie-related case' from this whole incident. My husband's friend, superintendent of this shop, a Jewish man, was arrested. My husband was a witness for this trial. He was fired from work immediately and we became desperately poor. We gradually pawned our belongings and began to borrow money from friends and relatives. We feared each coming day. The trial lasted long. Though all pies were tested for poisoning substances that were not detected in any of them the shop superintendent and others were pleaded guilty and the formulation of the guilt was as follows: 'as of the date of testing the poison was not detected due to little quantity that they put'. The shop superintendent was sentenced to death. Fortunately it all ended in March 1953 after Stalin's death. All prisoners were released.

This was the horrifying period, when we also learned who was or who was not a friend. My deceased sister Ena's husband Gershl Shuster often came to see us. He returned from the front and remarried, but he could not forget Ena and their children. He talked about them and about our hard Jewish fate. He was the one to tell us about the plan to deport Jews to Birobidzhan and there were rumors about it in the town, but only in the 1990s we learned that Stalin actually had this plan in truth and only the death of the chief prevented this from happening. Then my friend Yelizaveta Levit, an obstetrician – she was my doctor, when Inna was born, visited us. Her husband Vasiliy Ivanov, Russian, a field surgeon, a wonderful doctor and person, said once during the period of the doctors' plot that he knew doctor Vovsi (editor's note: a talented Jewish doctor, one of the accused in the doctors' case), and other accused and didn't believe this slander. All at once the 'organs' took to Vasiliy. He was made to prove his Slavic origin in presence of all members of the bureau of the district party committee showing his uncircumcised genital. After this humiliation Vasiliy fell ill. His wife came to see us and said that Jews were going to be sent to the Far East and that her husband was going with us. We were horrified; I was yelling that I would rather burn my house and myself than leave home. I was expecting a baby. My second daughter Alla was born on 7 February 1953. And then miracles began all at once. Stalin died, accused doctors were released, the 'pie case' was closed and all accused, including Mishnayevskiy, sentenced to death was released. My husband was employed by the refrigeration factory reimbursing him for the time he was away from work. Yelizaveta's husband Vasiliy, though, died almost at the same time as Stalin.

In those years my husband's uncles living in the USA found us through third parties. They sent us a big parcel with clothes for my husband and daughter. Some time later the Foreign Legal Collegium invited us to their office and informed us that our relatives died and that we were their heirs. They

left us three thousand dollars, but at that time this was an incredible fortune. However, considering the current situation and attitudes toward Jews, my husband refused from this money. We didn't agree to receive it for a few years in a row: firstly, we knew that the state would get it one way or another, and secondly, we were just afraid. We finally received it in the late 1960s, when contacts with foreigners were not criminal any longer. We needed this money a lot: my husband was very ill and had been bedridden for almost three years. We spent all this money on doctors and medications. Wolf recovered, but he often felt ill since then. My husband died in 1983. We lived a happy life, full of love and understanding. We spent a lot of time together, went out of town, and liked spending our vacations at the seashore whenever we could afford it. My husband and I read a lot, loved theater and attended all premier performances. We spent a lot of time with our daughters teaching them to like good literature, theater, listen to music, talked a lot in the evenings to raise harmonious and spiritual people of them.

We raised wonderful daughters. Inna, the older one, showed talents since childhood. She played the piano beautifully, drew and wrote poems. She knew about Babi Yar and death of her relatives in Kamenets-Podolskiy. She heard Gershl's story about his family. Inna knew all details of the 'pie case'. She identified herself as a Jew since early childhood, felt responsible for her people and shared their sorrow. Inna has faced everyday anti-Semitism since she was a child, but what is amazing is that Inna tried to find explanation when other children called her 'zhydovka' - in their hard postwar childhood, poverty and lack of education. Inna studied very well, but when she was in the second form, she fell ill with poliomyelitis. She spent a lot of time in hospital and in a recreation center. A few years afterward Inna walked on crutches, but when she walked without them, the doctors were struck by her strong will and spirit. When my daughter fell ill, I had to quit work to take care of her. I took work home, and the whole family helped me to knit bags that I took to the shop and they paid very little for this work. Inna attended an art studio and submitted her documents to the Art College and failed, naturally. It was next to impossible for a Jewish girl to enter this kind of a higher educational institution in Kiev. After her second effort that failed Inna's friends advised her to send her works to Moscow Polygraphist College. She did and soon she entered the Faculty of Book Design. She studied by correspondence, and I always accompanied her to Moscow, when she went to take her exams. Inna finished the college very successfully. At that time she already had an interesting job. She made dolls since childhood and this became her profession. She made sketches and sample dolls for several toy factories. Inna received a decent reward for her work. She also drew pictures just for herself. In recent years Inna's talent in literature has shown up. She had a few books published and her works published in magazines in Kiev, Israel and USA. Inna writes about Jews - the ones she knew or heard about in her childhood. Regretfully, my daughter has suffered from poor sight lately, but she continues her work. Inna married Arnold Lesovoy, a Jewish guy, in 1974. He was born in Chernovtsy in 1946. Arnold is a brilliant mathematician. They've had a happy life together for many years. In 1976 Inna's son Maxim was born. Maxim got fond of Judaism after he went to a Jewish camp in his teens. This became the essence of his life. Maxim is a religious Orthodox Jew, one of the leaders of the religious community in Kiev. His Jewish name given to him at the brit milah ritual conducted in his adulthood is Moshe Elizeer. Maxim is married and has a daughter. His family follow kashrut strictly, celebrates Sabbath and observes all Jewish religious traditions. I live with my daughter and son-in-law. We celebrate all Jewish holidays and try to observe Sabbath. In 1999 my grandson insisted that Inna and Arnold stood under the chuppah at the Brodskiy synagogue on their 'silver wedding'. This was very moving and ceremonious.

My second daughter Alla dedicated herself to music. She failed to enter the Conservatory in Kiev and went to Gorkiy where there are no prejudiced attitudes to Jews. She finished the conservatory there and became a pianist. Alla married a Jewish guy. Her husband Victor Gotlib, born in 1948, became a scientist in mathematic and chemistry. She was thinking of returning to Kiev for many years, but when Chernobyl occurred we convinced her that they should stay away from here. Alla has two sons: Yuriy, born in 1979, and Vladimir, born in 1986. In the early 1990s they moved to Israel where they live in Ashdod. Alla's sons had a circumcision ritual in Israel. Now their names are Uri (Yuriy) and Zeev (Vladimir).

Now let me tell you a few words about my sister Fira. She lived with my family for several years after she returned from evacuation before she married Boris Dimenstein, a welder. Fira has two children: Alla and Edward. Fira, her husband and their son Edward moved to Israel in the late 1970s. Her husband died a few years ago. Her daughter Alla lives in Ukraine.

We've often discussed the subject of emigration in our family. We've always been interested in Israel, particularly during the 6-Day War [28](#) and the War of Judgment Day [29](#). We've always been concerned about this country that we believe to be ours. However, we didn't venture to emigrate. First my husband was ill and now it is my daughter. Besides, she cannot part with her pictures - there are about 100 of them and we won't be allowed to take them with us. But what is most important is that Inna cannot imagine leaving Ukraine and Russia. She has grown up in this culture and became an artist and a writer. As for me, I wouldn't mind moving to Israel despite my old age. I think that my grandson Maxim and his family will take this decision and will finally become citizens of Israel, though his cause of revival the Jewish religion and traditions in Ukraine is also very important.

Our family was very enthusiastic about perestroika [30](#). Finally all bans disappeared and people got to know the truth about the totalitarian regime and these infinite lies in which we had to live our lives. All borders were opened, the literature that was under a ban before came up and religious life was reborn. Of course, the material part of life has become more difficult, but I hope these are temporary hardships and Ukraine will become a free and prosperous country.

My daughter and I have not become religious. We do not observe traditions or celebrate holidays, but I order a memorial prayer for my dear ones at the synagogue every year on Yom Kippur. I took this vow back in 1944, when I got to know that my family perished. I also pray for my daughters and grandchildren wishing them happiness. I think that I've lived a happy life despite all the suffering that I had to live through. I loved and was loved.

## **GLOSSARY:**

### **[1](#) Great Patriotic War**

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



threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **2 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.

## **3 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

## **4 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.

## **5 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.

## **6 Pogroms in Ukraine**

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

## **7 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **8 Famine in Ukraine**

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

## **9 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **10 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.

### **11 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

### **12 Markish, Peretz (1895-1952)**

Yiddish writer and poet, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

### **13 Kvitko, Lev (1890-1952)**

Jewish writer, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

### **14 Odessa**

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were heders in 19 prayer houses.

### **15 Bund**

The short name of the General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, Bund means Union in Yiddish). The Bund was a social democratic organization representing Jewish craftsmen from the Western areas of the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilnius in 1897. In 1906 it joined the autonomous fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Working Party and took up a Menshevist position. After the Revolution of 1917 the organization split: one part was anti-Soviet power, while the other remained in the Bolsheviks' Russian Communist Party. In 1921 the Bund dissolved itself in the USSR, but continued to exist in other countries.

### **16 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the

Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **17 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

## **18 Professor Mamlock**

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf – a friend of Bertolt Brecht – from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

## **19 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

## **20 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.

## **21 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which

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

## **22 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannerheim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannerheim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

## **23 Erenburg, Ilya Grigorievich (1891-1967)**

Famous Russian Jewish novelist, poet and journalist who spent his early years in France. His first important novel, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julio Jurento* (1922) is a satire on modern European civilization. His other novels include *The Thaw* (1955), a forthright piece about Stalin's régime which gave its name to the period of relaxation of censorship after Stalin's death.

## **24 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

## **25 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.

## **26 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'.

### **27 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.

### **28 Six-Day-War**

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

### **29 Yom Kippur War**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

### **30 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.