

Ilia Rozenfeld Biography

Ilia Rozenfeld

Kiev

Ukraine

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Ilia Rozenfeld and his wife Yelena live in a three-bedroom apartment (that is small, though) in a five-storied brick house of “khrushchovka’ [1](#) type in the center of Kiev. The furniture in their apartment is neither old nor new. There are many books in bookcases and bookshelves in the room and hallway. The host has a small study with many books in it and a desk with a computer on it in the center of the room. This is probably the most valuable thing in their possession. Ilia is a man of average height, rather thin, with nicely looking gray hair and dark bright eyes. He has a white shirt and his home jacket on. He makes an impression of a nice intelligent and sensitive man who can describe his feelings and emotions well and his long story illustrates this very well.



My paternal great grandfather Isaac Rozenfeld was born in 1842 in Kobelyaki town of Poltava region, 320 km from Kiev. He was a joyful and sociable, even mischievous man. He was not made for business, though he dealt in wholesales, but if it hadn’t been for my great grandmother, whose name I don’t know, who had strong will and was business-oriented, my great grandfather would have brought his family to beggary joking and playing around. There is a family legend about one incident describing my great grandfather and great grandmother to the best. Once, when they were on the way to the market in Gadyach town, a bunch of gypsies surrounded their wagon offering their services in fortunetelling.

My great grandfather whipped the horse and they broke through the crowd, when one gypsy woman got angry and yelled: ‘You need to know that will die before sunset today!’ My great grandfather pretended he didn’t hear, but probably the gypsy woman’s words became ingrained in his heart. They stopped in an inn. My great grandfather got very quiet and shortly before sunset he felt ill and went to bed. When my great grandmother saw that things were not going well, she ran to the tavern, brought a glass of self-made vodka and made my great grandfather drink it all. He did and fell asleep. He woke up before dawn and realized that the gypsy’s prophecy did not come true. He calmed down and cheered up. My great grandfather Isaac lived many years and had many

children who brought this story through generations.

This is all I know about my great grandfather. I don't know my great grandparents' dates of birth or death or how many children they had. Their oldest son, my grandfather Shymon was born in Kobelyaki in 1860. He finished cheder and an accounting course. He married a Jewish girl from his town, when he was rather young, but this was customary with Jewish families. My grandmother's name was Anna, but I don't know her maiden's name. In the early 1900s my grandfather and his family moved to Poltava where they settled down in the lower part of the town Podol [editor's note: Poltava was a province center, a wonderfully beautiful town buried in verdure. It was populated with Ukrainians for the most part.

In the early 20th century its population constituted about 230 thousand people, 12 thousand of them were Jews. Jews mainly dealt in trade. There were 10 synagogues and prayer houses in the town], a Jewish neighborhood. My grandfather's solid brick house is still there. My grandmother's distant relative Moldavskiy [editor's note: Moldavskiy was a Jewish merchant, grain dealer. He contributed to the opening of a Jewish hospice house and it was named after him, and later he also built a hospice house for Orthodox believers], who owned a mill, employed my grandfather. The mill was located almost across the street from my grandfather's house. He worked there as assistant accountant till his old age. My grandmother Anna died in 1920. She had diabetes that became acute during the period of famine. My grandfather passed away in 1923. I was born before he died, but I cannot remember him, of course.

Shymon and Anna had 12 children, but only nine of them lived. I remember my aunt and uncles' names as they were called at home. Perhaps, they had different names written in their birth certificates or passports: Rosa, born in 1880, Vera, born in 1882, Manya, born in 1885, uncle Emmanuel [called Monia at home], born in 1890, Lubov, born in 1892, Rachil, born in 1894, Fania, born in 1896, and Bertha, born in 1902. My father Alexandr was the fourth child. He was born in 1888. The older children were born in Kobelyaki and later the family moved to Poltava.

My grandfather's family had a rather modest life. My grandmother was a housewife. She had a housemaid to help her with the children and about the house. There was a vegetable garden near the house. My grandparents kept livestock: poultry and a cow. My grandfather was a progressive man for his time. He was fond of reading preferring Russian classics to any other books. He was very fond of music: opera and symphonic music. He went to the opera House in Kharkov few times a year and dreamed that there would be a time, when he could watch operas staying at home. This was long before the invention of TV. My father's family wasn't quite religious. My grandmother and grandfather didn't attend a synagogue or raise their children religious, but they tried to observe Jewish traditions.

I don't know whether they celebrated Sabbath. My father never mentioned this to me. However, the family got together for a meal on Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. My grandfather wanted his children to get secular education and implemented this dream. Rosa and Vera finished secondary schools and a midwife school in Poltava. Lubov and Fania finished Medical College in Poltava: Lubov became a dentist and Fania became an obstetrician. Maria, Rachil and Bertha studied in Conservatories: Maria - in Moscow and her sisters - in Petersburg. They became pianists and music teachers. Uncle Emmanuel finished the Coal Industry College and became an engineer.

My father, the first son in the family, had to help his father to support the family. Therefore, after finishing an elementary Jewish school at the age of 12 my grandfather took him to Kharkov (440 km from Kiev) to the Portugalov [editor's note: Portugalov pharmacies were in all bigger towns of the czarist Russia] pharmacy where my father studied pharmacology working in this pharmacy. He finished a grammar school as an external student and entered the pharmaceutical Faculty of Kharkov University. Upon graduation my father went to Poltava and took up a job in the pharmacy. My father was not religious and didn't observe Jewish traditions, but in those years he got fond of Zionist ideas and read Zhabotinskiy [2](#), and attended Zionist clubs [editor's note: Poltava was one of the Zionist centers in Russia. There was a club of young Zionists here]. He was also fond of poetry and wrote nice poems. My father also inherited his father's love of music. He went to operas and symphonic music concerts. He met my mother one of those days and they got married in 1919.

My mother's family lived in Poland since ancient times. In the end of the 19th century Poland was under the Russian rule. I don't know the exact date and place of my grandfather Iona Wolfenfeld. Judging from existing photographs he was about 10 years older than my grandfather Shymon. I don't know the first or maiden name of my maternal grandmother. My mother's family lived in Zamost'ye town of Radom district.

My grandparents didn't have many children by the standards of their time: older son Yakov, son Peretz, my mother's older sister Gintsia and my mother Malka, born in 1896. My mother was much younger than her older brothers and sisters, and their children were almost the same age as my mother. The children got Jewish education: the boys finished cheder, and the girls studied with a melamed at home. Grandfather Iona knew the torah and Talmud and taught his children Hebrew, Jewish prayers, history and traditions. They followed kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays in the family. My grandfather usually wore a long jacket and a kippah, and my grandmother also wore traditional Jewish clothes and a wig. Grandfather Iona was a contractor in the Russian troops in Poland. Commander of the division that my grandfather worked for was Anikeev, a Russian general. His family and my grandfather Iona's Jewish patriarchal family were friends.

Anikeev's wife and my grandmother became friends. Anikeeva particularly liked my mother, whom she called Mayechka affectionately. She taught her good manners and French. It's hard to explain grandfather Iona's intentions: whether he wanted my mother, the youngest in the family, to be able to support herself, or he wanted her to know about the true life, but when she was about 9 years old, he sent her to a shoemaker to learn his trade. He trained my mother for about a year. I don't know whether it helped my mother in her future life, but at least my mother could do everything with her hands. Then my mother finished a grammar school for girls in Zamost'ye.

In 1914 WWI began and in 1915 the Russian army began to retreat and there were refugees from Russia moving to the south and to Ukraine. My grandfather's family was following the Anikeev division and temporarily settled down in Poltava where my grandfather bought a two-storied houses with eight rooms. My mother found Poltava a little boring. She was pretty and dressed nicer than local girls in Poltava and didn't find it interesting to socialize with them. To keep herself busy she went to an accounting course, studied French with Anikeev's wife and read books in German to

remember what she had learned in her grammar school. My mother was very good at languages. She knew Yiddish, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, French and German. She also knew Hebrew.

I know very little about the life of my parents' families during this uneasy period of the revolution [3](#), Civil War [4](#), gangs [5](#) and famine. I know that during pogroms the Anikeev family gave shelter to my mother's family. My mother's cousin brother, whose name I don't know, who served in the czarist army during WWI, stayed in Poltava and the Bolsheviks who came into town shot him, when he was walking in the town wearing his military uniform.

A tragedy happened in the family of general Anikeev at that time. The general was a true Russian patriot and didn't want to move abroad staying home with his wife and their son, a Russian officer. Anikeev's daughter married a French man in 1918 and moved to Paris with her husband. In 1919 some Red army soldiers broke into the general's house, dragged the general and his son into the yard and shot them before his wife's eyes. They also forced her to leave the house declaring her a 'lishenka' (deprive) [editor's note: After the revolution of 1917 people that had at least minor private property (owned small stores or shops) or small businesses were deprived of their property and were commonly called 'deprivees' [derived from Russian 'deprive']. Between 1917 middle of 1930s this part of population was deprived of civil rights and their children were not allowed to study in higher educational institutions. Communists declared themselves to protect the interests of the oppressed working class and peasants and only representatives of these classes enjoyed all civil rights.]. She lived in a half-ruined house at the market sharing it with a prostitute and worked at a Laundromat.

She starved and often visited us. My mother gave her food and some clothes and talked with her for long. During the Great Patriotic War Anikeeva stayed in Poltava [6](#) and when we returned home from the evacuation she came to see us and told us about fascist atrocities against Jews. It turned out that during the occupation her daughter came from France to take her there, but the widow of a Russian general refused to move abroad and told her daughter that she wanted to be buried where her husband and son were buried. Anikeeva died in the first years after the war.

My parents met during the Civil War. In 1919 they got married. They didn't have a traditional wedding. They registered their marriage in a registry office and in the evening they had a dinner party with their relatives at my mother's home. After they got married my mother and father lived with grandmother and grandfather Volfenfeld. However, few months after the wedding almost all of my mother's relatives moved to Poland that separated from Russia after WWI. Only my mother's brother Peretz who was married and had children by that time stayed in Poltava. Later they moved to Kharkov. During the great Patriotic War Peretz was in evacuation. He died in 1946, shortly after he returned to Kharkov. Peretz had three children: Rachil, born in 1902, German teacher, was single, died in Kharkov in 1975, middle son Iosif, born in 1904, died in 1966, and younger son Moisey, born in 1912, perished at the front in 1941.

My mother never saw her parents, sister Gintsia or brother Yakov again. She corresponded with them for a long time, but terminated this correspondence in 1937 since it was not safe [7](#) to continue it. The fate of my mother's family was tragic. According to the archives grandfather Iona and grandmother were kept in the Warsaw ghetto where they perished. Her older brother Yakov also perished there. He was single and had no children. Gintsia Bialskaya, which was her family

name, had three children. Her older son Elek Bialskiy, born in 1900, big, fair-haired, with nicely-groomed moustache, finished an Agricultural College in Poland before the occupation, defended his candidate's dissertation and was a teacher. During the occupation he went to work for a landlord. Elek did not look like a Jew and besides, his landlord gave shelter to him rescuing him from deportation to the ghetto. He survived and lived and worked in Poland for many years. Another son Avraam Bialskiy perished in 1939, when Hitler troops invaded Poland. Gintsia's daughter Tsyrtse was married. She gave birth to a girl few days before Poland was invaded in 1939.

Elek took this girl to a Catholic nunnery where he said that she was Polish and the nuns raised the girl calling her Carina. Tsyrtse and her husband and Gintsia perished in the ghetto. After the Great Patriotic War Elek began his search for this girl. He addressed the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [8](#), Chairman of the Soviet Informbureau Lozovskiy, and either Lozovskiy or his associate Yuzefovich went to Poland, found Carina and brought her to Moscow. Yuzefovich or one of his assistants adopted Carina. What happened was that after the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was defeated Lozovskiy and Yuzefovich were executed, and some distant relatives gave shelter to the girl and raised her. Carina finished a college, became a philologist and got married. Now she lives in Israel with her husband and daughters. In the late 1940s Elek married Lilia, a Polish girl, lived in Otwock town near Warsaw and visited us in Poltava many times. In Warsaw he installed a monument to his deceased parents, my grandparents Volfenfelds, somewhere in the vicinity of the ghetto. Elek died in 1995. His son Alek and daughter Monika live in Ottawa, Canada.

I, Iliia Rozenfeld, was born in Poltava on 1 August 1922, after my grandparents Volfenfelds moved to Poland. Over one later my grandfather Shymon died. My father worked in the pharmacy and later he became director of a pharmaceutical school in Poltava. My mother worked and studied in college. The family lived in the same house where their parents had lived. The new regime renamed the street to Komsomolskaya. My parents were allowed to keep two rooms, though they were really big, about 30 square meters each. My mother went to work as an accountant in prison. She had a kind heart and began to take messages and parcels to prisoners and my father insisted that she quit her job, or she would have been arrested. My mother went to work as a German lecturer in Poltava Construction College where she later became chief of department.

I had a nanny, a Ukrainian woman from a Ukrainian village near Poltava. Unfortunately, I don't remember her name. I loved her dearly: she spent all her time with me telling me fairy tales and fables. She was a full member of our family living with us. She was very old. After living with us for ten years she left our house in 1933, during the period of famine [10](#) thinking that my parents were not able to support the whole family. For some reason, my parents didn't insist on her staying and she walked back to her village and this is all I know about her. It was dramatic for me at the time since my nanny was the closest person I had.

Thanks to my father, our house was a center of the Rozenfeld family gatherings: my father's sisters, their husbands and children. Though Rosa was the oldest, no family issues were decided without my father's advice. I have dim memories of aunt Rosa. She associates in my childhood memory with something warm and fragrant. She lived with her husband David in Kharkov. She was a midwife. I don't remember her husband's surname. In 1927 during an earthquake she got overstressed and fell ill with acute leukemia. She died in 1928. She didn't have children. Her

husband remarried, but he remained a friend of the family and often visited us.

My father's sister Vera was also a midwife. Her husband Grigoriy Rubinshtein, attorney assistant, finished Kharkov Law College. He came from the rich family of bankers Rubinshteins. The family owned estate in Kharkov before the revolution. Grigoriy was assistant attorney before the revolution. After the revolution he worked as a lawyer. During the revolution her husband's relatives, including his parents, moved abroad and lived in Geneva. They supported Vera's family and they survived during the famine of the 1930s. In the early 1930s Grigoriy was deprived of all civil rights and authorities forced the family to move out of their house declaring them 'lishentsy'. Uncle Grigoriy was put in prison where he was kept for about a year. The family lived in a shabby hut near the market. Vera made stockings on a knitting machine working at home. Many women, including my mother, were doing this to earn their living. These machines did not knit heels and women either had to knit them themselves or go to Kharkov to have heels made in a shop. Then Grigoriy's mother sent a linking machine from Geneva and Vera started her own business: all other women began to bring stocking for her to link them. Grigoriy died in 1937. During the Great Patriotic War Vera and her daughter were in evacuation with us and after the war we returned to Poltava. She died in 1962. Her daughter Anna Rubinshtein became an ophthalmologist. She was single and died in Poltava in 1966.

Aunt Maria finished the Moscow Conservatory. She had her husband Yakov Wasserman lived in Pheodosia in the Crimea. They were both music teachers. They had no children. Fascists hanged Maria and Yakov along with other Jews in the central square in Poltava in 1941.

My father's brother Emmanuel, who had finished a Mine College by then, lived in Kharkov before the early 1930s and then he moved to Moscow. Emmanuel's family, but his son Yuriy, was in Moscow during the Great Patriotic War. Yuriy, born in 1919, was at the front. Emmanuel and his wife Lubov died in 1961, their son Yuriy passed away in 1976. Emmanuel's daughter Anna Rozenfeld, born in 1923, a neuropathologist, is a pensioner and lives in Moscow.

My aunts Rachil, Fania and Lubov lived in Poltava. Rachil's husband Moisey Vishnevetskiy was an accountant and Rachil was a music teacher. They had no children. Moisey died in 1934. Rachil was in the evacuation during the great Patriotic War and then returned to Poltava. She died in 1958.

Fania Pozina after her husband was a nurse during WWI and worked as an obstetrician. In the late 1930s Fania and her husband Naum Pozin and their daughter Anna, born in 1923, moved to Kharkov. Naum perished at the front and Fania and Anna returned to Poltava after the war. Fania died in 1959. Anna, a construction engineer by education, married Fomenko, a Ukrainian man. She lives in Poltava.

My father's younger sister Lubov lived in the same house with us in another apartment. She was a dentist. Her husband Lev Wainstein died in 1938. My aunt died in 1958. Her son Victor was at the war where he was severely wounded. He was a dentist. He lived in Kiev. Hi son Vadim lives in New York. Victor died in 1989.

Our apartment became a communal apartment [11](#). My father's sisters, their husbands and children often got together in our apartment to celebrate birthdays and Soviet holidays. We didn't observe

any Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. I don't remember any Jewish celebrations in my childhood.

Our family was wealthy for this period of time: my mother and father had a good education and were respectable people in the town. My parents told me that in the early 1920s there was a ChK tenant [editor's note: ChK - full name VuChK - All-Russian Emergency Commission of struggle against counter revolution and sabotage: the first security authority in the Soviet Union established per order of the council of people's commissars dated 07 December 1917. Its chief was Felix Dzerzhynskiy. In 1920 after the Civil War Lenin ordered to disband it and it became a part of NKVD [12](#)] occupied one room in my parents' apartment. He wore a leather jacket, a pince-nez and believed that he had the right to come into any room in the apartment without knocking on the door, open their cupboards and take away anything he liked. He entered our room without saying a word, took food and wine out of the cupboard and left. Of course, all other tenants were afraid of him and did not object. There were other tenants in the apartment: the Yuniyevskiy, a Jewish family, who occupied three rooms. The head of the family was a theatrical manager staging performances. His older daughter Frieda was the same age with me, we were friends. Their younger daughter Lilia was born in 1930. There was another tenant: Nyusia, a young plump beautiful Jewish woman. My mother sniffed scornfully at the mention of her name: she earned her living with the most ancient profession bringing men into her room.

I remember, when she invited me to her room (I was about 6 years old). Her lover, half-naked, was lying on the bed and they began to show me weird pictures which I later understood were (pornographic) pictures. I told my parents about it and there was a scandal that evening. My mother often had rows with this neighbor. She had a coarse voice from smoking. My mother called it a 'market-place' voice. Once I played a joke on her. Nyusia had poor sight. I drew a ruble on a notebook sheet, crumpled it and threw it in the hallway before her door. Later I heard her saying angrily that vendors at the market told her that she had false money. It was a wicked joke on my part, but I didn't understand it then. Later Nyusia smartened up and married Olshanskiy, a Jewish man. She gave birth to her daughter Rita and began to live a quiet life of a married woman.

My friends were my parents' friends' children and my cousin brothers and sisters. One of my friends was Sonia, my father's friend doctor Rabinovich's daughter. My father also had a Ukrainian or Polish friend doctor Alexandrovich and his son Taras was also my friend. My parents' friends often visited us. My father recited his poems and Russian and foreign classical poems at their gatherings. My father often went to a book store buying another book each time. We had many. My mother read French and German books to remember the languages. There were few books in Yiddish at home. I think they were my grandfather's. I also liked reading. We had a piano. My father never studied music, but he played by hearing. My aunt Rachil taught me music and later I had classes with teacher Vazhenin from the Music School in Poltava. He was an old man and told me much about the last century composers whom he knew. I went to my first symphonic concert at the age of 10.

Yuriy Levitin, a well known composer, was playing there. [Composer Yuriy Abramovich Levitin, 1912-1985, Honored Artist of the RSFSR - 1980, composed pop songs and music to cartoons and movies]. My father took part in the arrangement of this concert. This composer had hemophilia and had an attack of it when he arrived at Poltava. My father went to Kharkov to buy medications that

he needed and he could play at the concert in the open air theater in the town park. I was amazed and took to liking music for the rest of my life. I had a dream to become a composer like Levitin. I even composed little pieces that my family listened to courteously.

In 1930 I went to the first form of a Ukrainian school. There was a Jewish school in Poltava, but my parents didn't send me there. We were an assimilated family and since there was no Russian school in the town they chose a Ukrainian school for me. By the way, the Jewish school was closed in 1937 and the pupils came to our school. I had no problems with my studies and enjoyed going to school. However, during my first years at school there was famine in Ukraine. Our family was in a very hard situation, but my mother always thought of something to help the family. I remember that my grandmother sent us one dollar amounts – they were also poor. My mother went to buy buckwheat, herring and something else for this dollar at the Torgsin [13](#) store. Somebody gave my father pork fat and my mother cooked on it. I smelt his fat approaching our house coming back from school and felt sick: I couldn't eat it. My father told me off for that and said it was sinful to refuse from food when other children were starving. Once a young woman from a village came into our yard, when I was playing with a ball with other boys. She was barefooted and her legs, white and swollen, struck me. She was holding a boy by his hand and carrying another boy, thin and starved. She asked for food and we ran to our homes to get what we could.

We had nothing, but beetroots at home. My mother gave me a beetroots which I took to this woman. She wiped it with her hand and gave her boy to bite on it. Once there was a man lying on the stairs. There were lice on him and he was dying painfully and there was nothing that could be done to rescue him. We were scared. Once we were trying to get our ball from the bushes and there was a half-decayed corpse there. –Every night a thin horse-ridden cart rode along our street loaded with corpses with their legs sticking out. Those corpses were taken to a pit in a dump site.

I had Jewish and Ukrainian friends. We never thought about nationality. There was a Russian family living in our house, the family of the Sakharovs. They had three children: Vania, same age with me, his brother and older sister Sonia. Vania was my friend. Once, when we were playing football, Sonia called us 'zhydovskiye mordy' [kike] leaning out of the window. I already knew that it was a bad word, but I didn't quite understand its meaning. Then one of the older boys took an initiative and we went to complain to our school director Semyon Skliar, a Ukrainian man. He called a meeting. Even before the meeting our schoolmates decided to boycott Sonia and she knew that she did a wrong thing. She was sitting at the meeting with her eyes downcast. The director made a condemning speech. Sonia cried and promised she would never use this word and abuse Jews. This happened in 1934.

I became a pioneer in 1934, and few days later the country heard the news about the murder of Kirov [14](#). I remember this bright frosty day at the start of winter. We were lined up for a meeting and listened to the mourning program on the radio. Aunt Bertha's husband Yakov Zbarskiy was visiting with us at that time. He brought me a gorgeous bicycle from Moscow that I was dreaming about. I remember his conversation with my father one evening, when I was eavesdropping from behind the door. I remember him saying about the murderer of Kirov, so much loved by the people: 'That's him!...'. I could never believe that my uncle was talking about Stalin. Only decades later I got to know the terrible truth: he was the cause of millions deaths of the best people in the country, but then I believed propaganda thinking that I was living in the fairest and happiest

society. My uncle Yakov's fate was tragic. Yakov, born in 1900, worked in a printing house. He joined the revolution and became a communist. However, in the 1920s he supported Lev Trotskiy [15](#) , and was heard to be a member of the Zinoviev-Kamenev block [16](#) . Later he 'acknowledged his mistakes' in public that was customary at the time, and later held rather high-level official posts.

He lived in Moscow and was director of the Exhibition of Achievements of Public Economy and was deputy People's Commissar of sovkhoses. At one time he was even military attaché in Berlin. In 1937 during the period of mass arrests [17](#) he was arrested and executed. His family was notified that he "had been sentenced without the right of correspondence" that was similar to the death sentence. Aunt Bertha was sent in exile to Djambul town in Kazakhstan where she lived for many years. Their daughter Marina stayed with aunt Rachil in Poltava. She was a widow and didn't have any children of her own.

My uncle's arrest had an impact on my life as well. In 1938 they didn't admit me to Komsomol [18](#) due to my uncle who was an 'enemy of the people' [19](#) . Many people were disappearing at this period. Our school teachers whom we loved were gone. Our favorite Russian teacher Polina Uschenko who taught us love for the Russian literature, disappeared. We got together at her home where she recited poems of Anna Akhmatova [20](#) , who was a forbidden author. Somebody must have reported on her. At least, once she didn't show up at school and nobody ever saw her again. My father's close Ukrainian friend Pisarevskiy, a Ukrainian literature teacher, an invalid of the Civil War, was arrested as a Japanese spy and disappeared. Our school teacher of mathematic Israel Garkave, an old provincial Jew with a funny Jewish accent, whom we adored, also disappeared. He was arrested, and his family with many children was gone, too.

Then his replacement Valentin Golovnia, a young teacher of mathematic, was arrested and the third teacher followed his predecessors. Our teacher of history Sarah (I don't remember her surname) also disappeared. We were 15-16 years old, we were raised on the examples of Bolshevik heroes and believed the Soviet reality to be the best in the world, but then there was some dual attitude in our romantic minds. On one side there were holidays, marches and parades that we liked so much, and on the other side there were 'enemies of the people' who were heroes just shortly before. I asked questions at home and my father answered me truly saying that he believed these were mistakes that great Stalin didn't know about. He spoke to me eye-to-eye and told me to never discuss this subject with anybody, but we, boys, discussed those terrible arrest and people who were disappearing. The time proved that those boys were true friends: nobody reported on his friends.

Every family in those horrible 1930s was prepared for anything. My father was afraid of arrest and was particularly concerned about my mother who still corresponded with her parents living in Poland. My mother packed a basket with underwear and dried bread and kept it ready in case of arrest. Once my mother's colleagues planned a celebration at a restaurant. My mother dressed up and was ready to go, but my father didn't let her go, however much she cried and begged him. My father must have intuitively known about something: on the following day all participants of this celebration were arrested.

In the middle 1930s one of the subjects we were discussing was fascists coming to power in Germany. Since the book 'Mein campf' was published we were aware of the ideology of Hitler and

his attitude toward Jews, but we didn't think the same about common Germans since we were raised to be internationalists. I remember that in 1936 we had a German classmate whose surname was Waingoltz whose father had an employment contract in Poltava. We were not quite friends with him, but we went along well. In 1938 he bid farewell to us showing a fancy official paper with a stamp on it: his subpoena for the army service in German. We didn't think that this guy was probably going to be fighting against our country – he was just leaving for his Motherland.

In August 1939 the Ribbentrop-Molotov [21](#) Pact was signed surprisingly for us. This was weird at least: this surprisingly emerging friendship with fascist Germany. This so-called friendship did not deceive anybody. Many people understood that we were on the edge of war. My close friend Mitia Zayats, musician, was about two years older than me. We were both fond of music. He was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison. I met with him after the war. He was an ill broken man. His fingers were frost-bitten in the camp and he could never play again. What happened was that after the execution of this Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in 1939 Mitia said at one meeting: 'Well, we will have problems because of this'. The following night he was arrested as an 'enemy of the people'.

On 1 September 1939 fascists invaded Poland. Refugees who were Polish Jews for the most part began to escape to Ukraine. There were Polish children coming to our school. Though we were the same age, we were still different. Those Polish children were more mature and knew more about human relations. Many of the guys had visited brothels in Poland and it was strange for us, Soviet guys, who were raised in a more proper Soviet manner. Besides, they knew about jazz while we only heard Soviet marches. They told us about modern music and movies and we were a little jealous about it. But what we never envied was that had already faced disaster: air raids, ruined houses and towns that they knew about fascist atrocities and were forced out of their homes. They told us about it and the great Patriotic War was no surprise for us.

I finished the tenth form of school with a 'red certificate' in 1940. I understood that my dream of composing music was not to come true since I had to learn a profession. Besides, I had been ill with pneumonia with pleurisy and was released from the army service. The family decided that I was to become an engineer, though I was more disposed to humanitarian sciences. In 1940 I entered the founding Faculty of the Kharkov Machine Building College. After studying there for less than half year I realized this was not for me. Besides, I was used to living at home with my family and didn't feel comfortable living in another town. In early 1941 I got a transfer to the Construction College in Poltava where my mother was working.

In spring 1941 a hospital for patients from Romania and Poland was deployed in our college. We were passing exams in the yard. The war was literally 'up in the air'. My father's intuition struck me again. My aunt Lubov Wainstein and her family – her husband and their son Victor - were living with us: they were having their apartment repaired. On Saturday of 21 June she decided to go to Kharkov all of a sudden, but my father said: 'Don't go there. A war can start at any moment'.

On the morning of 22 June I was preparing for my exam in geodesy. I was turning a knob on my radio. I liked radios and assembled radios listening to different radio stations. There were different channels on the radio and I grasped something in German about some 'losses' of the soviet troops

and their retreat. I called my mother who had fluent German and she was also surprised to hear those strange messages. At 12 o'clock we listened to Molotov's speech [22](#) who said that the war began. At first it was rather quiet in the town. My family and aunts decided to evacuate and were waiting for the official evacuation of our college. There was no panic in the town, but the streets were deserted as if all residents had left for resorts all of a sudden. Fania's husband Naum Kozin, my cousin brother Victor, Lubov's son and brother Yuriy, Emmanuel's son from Moscow, were recruited to the army. My father was not subject to army service due to his age and I was released from army service.

My fellow students and I were working in a kolkhoz near Poltava for a month picking carrots, tomatoes, paprika and cucumbers whether they were ripe or not, just to leave nothing to the enemy since it was clear that Poltava was to be invaded. In August 1941 bombings began. German aircraft were dropping bombs on the railway station, onto the trains with equipment and the military. Aunt Lubov and aunt Rachil evacuated to Djambul where aunt Bertha was living. Aunt Maria was in Pheodosia. We didn't have any information about her plans. My father wrote her that she had to evacuate, but we received no response. Some older Jews in Poltava who remembered WWI, did not want to evacuate. My father was explaining to people that they had to evacuate. Many did not know that fascists were not going to be good to people, those Germans were different from the ones who were in Russia during WWI. There was no official information from authorities or in newspapers that it was necessary for Jews to evacuate.

In early September, actually 10 days before the occupation of the town, my mother and I, aunt Vera and Ania evacuated from Poltava. We were going with my college to Uralsk town in the Northern Kazakhstan region. My father was staying in Poltava to transfer the pharmacy, money and material values to authorities. He went to Kharkov to submit the papers and money. We had left and had no information about my father.

We took a local train to Kharkov where we took a train that left before the scheduled time due to an air raid. Near the Merekha station we took another train since our train was severely damaged near Merekha. We went through Oryol, Tula and saw damaged trains on the sides of the rail track. In late September we reached Uralsk town 2500 km from home.

Uralsk was a small town. A two-storied house in Sovetskaya Street was prepared for our college. There was no heating in the building. We studied in three shifts and had to sit in class in our winter coats. Our director Yuriy Damanskiy and our lecturers Marchenko, Korchakov, Topchiy came with us. They were too old to serve in the army. Senior students were released from the army service according to an order issued by the government and since the term of studies was reduced to three years, we, second-year students, became senior pre-graduate students and were released from the army service.

We were accommodated in an apartment and at first my aunts Vera and Ania lived with us. In late November my father joined us. He walked on crutches: on the way he got into a bombing and had a leg fracture. He stayed in hospital for over a month. Aunt Vera and Ania moved to another apartment not far from us. My father went to work in the pharmacy of the military hospital and my mother continued her work in college.

The town was populated with kazaks [23](#) – from the Ural and Ukraine. They had a saying. In which ‘zhydy’ were mentioned negatively. I asked our kind and hospitable landlady who were zhydy and she shrugged her shoulders and said that they were probably some devils with horns and tails and was infinitely surprised, when I said that we were zhydy. The residents of the town were kind and friendly people and treated the Jewish newcomers kindly. I often went to the Ural River out of town with other boys. Our life was hard. We received food by food cards [the card system was introduced to directly regulate food supplies to the population by food and industrial product rates. During and after the great Patriotic War there were cards for workers, non-manual employees and dependents in the USSR. The biggest rates were on workers’ cards: 400 grams of bread per day], and could also buy pumpkins and potatoes. It was cold in winter. However, I was young and attended literature parties where I met Svetlana Sholokhova, the daughter of great write Mikhail Sholokhov [24](#), who lived in Uralsk before the war. I even visited her family and we had tea parties in the evening.

We had no information about our relatives in Poland or aunt Manya in Pheodosia. There was no information about fascist atrocities against Jews on the radio or in mass media. We didn’t know anything about Babi Yar [25](#) or thousands of other similar tragedies, but we knew somehow about the Warsaw ghetto and that there were Jews from all over Poland kept there. We kept in touch with my aunts in Djambul and my uncle Emmanuel’s family in Moscow. We got the information about the front from newspapers reading between the lines or from radio announcements. For example, if the radio said that there was fighting advancing a town, we knew that most likely this town was already liberated.

In 1943, after finishing the advanced course of our studies, our graduates were sent to restore and rebuild buildings and houses in Kharkov according to the Order issued by the State Defense Committee. Kharkov had just been liberated. In Kharkov I received a job assignment to Zaporozhiye, I worked in the towns of miners: Volnovakha and Yelenovka. We were restoring the mines and plants. I sent my documents to the Kharkov Military Engineering Academy, but shortly afterward it was dismissed and I withdrew my documents from there. I worked in these towns until middle 1944, and then I moved back to Poltava knowing that my parents were to return from Uralsk.

Our house was ruined. My aunts Rachil, Fania and Lubov were back to Kharkov and rented some flea-pit at the market. I stayed with them. Fania’s husband Naum Kozin perished at the front. Her daughter, who was the same age with me, studied in a college. My cousin brother Victor Wainstein was severely wounded: he had his jaw smashed to pieces and had to stay in hospitals for a long time after the war. My aunts were happy that I was with them doing all hard work for them, fetching water in buckets from a well two kilometers from where we lived and cutting wood for the stove. In summer I ploughed their vegetable garden of 36 square meters and helped them with picking potatoes and beans. My parents returned with the college at the beginning of autumn. They stayed with my aunts before they rented a small apartment. In autumn 1944 I went to complete my studies: there was an order issued enabling those who had finished a reduced course of studies to complete their education.

The postwar Poltava was different from the town of my childhood and so were the people. There was the feeling of aloofness between those who stayed in town during the war and those who returned from the evacuation and I cannot explain where it emerged from or understand it. Those residents, who stayed in the town during the rule of Germans, changed. I can even say that they gained the feeling of superiority over those who were in the evacuation and even disdain. There were people who became somebody else during the occupational regime. For example, director of our school Maria Petrenko, whom we just adored, a communist and an advanced woman, our ideal, lived with German commandant Libermayer during the occupation. There were orgies in her apartment at school where German officers were having fun with women. Maria wore furs and diamonds in public walking with Libermayer in the streets. She disappeared along with the Germans and there was no more information about her. My former classmate Maya Lisovskaya became a 'fascist bedding girl', as they said at the time. My other classmate Clara Neshenko became a friend of a German 'big shot'. After the occupation Clara moved to Lvov where she married the second secretary of the regional Party committee. My schoolmate Oleg Sydnev, a very strong guy, became a policeman in a camp and was known for his brutality. After the war he returned with forged documents and even entered our college, but was revealed and sentenced to death.

In 1945 I obtained my diploma and a job assignment in Kiev. My father was very happy: he always wanted me to leave this provincial town for a big city. Kiev was ruined and at first it was a severe probation for me to live there. I was employed by a design construction office. I stayed with my companion from Poltava for about ten days, but then they let me know that it would be decent for me to move out. I moved to the design office where I worked and slept on desks there. Two months later my Polish friend from Poltava Yuzik Poznanskiy got a job assignment [26](#) to Kiev and we received a room on the 7th floor of a hostel in an old building in 9, Franko Street. We received bread cards for 400 grams of bread, egg powder and sometimes some meat. It was impossibly little to make a living. We took our cards to the canteen in Narkomzem (ministry of land resources) in exchange for a meal of some thin soup and boiled cereal. We exchanged whatever we could for food at the market. I made soup with canned meat in a meat can on a spirit lamp and it lasted for few days. We dressed in God knows what and had shoes with the soles tied with ropes: there was no money or place to buy new shoes.

In 1947 I submitted my documents to the postgraduate course of the Construction Mechanics College. Although humanitarian subjects were closer to me, I was interested in everything new and took to engineering with all my heart. The postgraduate school didn't admit me: the processes against cosmopolitans [27](#) began and the state anti-Semitism was booming. Secretary of the admission commission was trying to warn me. She was a wise woman, but I didn't even understand what she was trying to tell me and my failure was a serious blow on me.

Regardless all problems those were beautiful years of my youth, when I had many friends. We went to operetta and opera theaters, and to concerts of symphonic and classical music in the Pervomayskiy Garden. We often gathered in one apartment, and once my friends sent me to a girl living nearby to pick up a record player from her. I liked the girl and invited her to join us. So I met my future wife Yelena Mestechkina. Yelena was born to a common, traditional and I would say religious Jewish family in Kiev in 1924. Her grandfather Iosif Mestechkin and her grandmother and her father's brothers perished in Babi Yar. Yelena, her father and mother were in the evacuation. In

1947, when we met, she was finishing the Kiev Medical College. We dated for few months and got married in the same year of 1947. We had a family dinner party and there was one guest: Yelena's cousin brother from Moscow. Even my parents couldn't come from Poltava – this was a hard time. They sent us a greeting telegram.

We moved into my wife parents' small two-bedroom apartment in a two-storied wooden house in 32, Artyoma Street. There were water supply and a toilet in the yard. The house was heated with a stove consuming huge quantities of deficit wood. Yelena and I shared a very small room and her parents and 7-year-old younger sister Zhanna slept in the living room.

On that day in August 1947, when we registered our marriage in a registry office, Yelena went to her first job in the laboratory of the Podol district hospital where she worked for 50 years from then on. In 1949 our son Alexandr was born. He grew up like all Soviet children: he went to a nursery school, kindergarten, and school and spent his vacations in pioneer camps. There were many joyful and sad events, particularly for Jews, in those years. A happy event was the establishment of Israel that attracted Jews from all over the world. My father was particularly happy about this. He had professed the Zionist ideas since childhood. And those were sad years due to the merciless state anti-Semitism in the late 1940s - early 1950s, when Stalin died. It started from the defeat struggle against the rootless cosmopolites leading to the made up 'doctors' plot' [29](#). In those years many Jews lost their jobs, were arrested and even executed as enemies of the people, like it happened in the late 1930s. They were fired from their leading or engineering positions from colleges, plants and factories. In early 1953, during the period of persecution of doctors, my wife was fired without any explanation of the reasons.

My father also suffered during this period. My father was ill since the early 1950s. He quit his job and could only walk with a stick. He used to walk in the park and once he gave candy to the children in the park. Trying to give up smoking he always carried sugar candy with him. Two young men approached him and saying: 'Zhydovskaya morda, you are poisoning our children!', they beat him brutally with a metal rod on his ill legs. They beat an old man believing in everything best. My father could never recover from this both physical and spiritual pain. He had to stay in bed and was overwhelmed with depression thinking of the caducity of living and vain hopes. My father passed away in 1955. We buried him in the town cemetery in Poltava without any rituals. Many, many years later, sorting out his papers, I found a poem, which he wrote shortly before he died:

We greet you, the presently living,
From the depth of the galloping time,
The presently living, mowing the hard load
Of occasional caducity of life.
Prisoners of eternity, we are all mute,
Forgotten by all, faded away for good,
We are unintentionally anxiously frank to this world,
Living shortly, we failed to save our hearts,
Remember forever, you, presently living,
That life is just a little spark, a flash, an instant.
And the generations following you
Will forget you in their vain blindness.

Always in chase of things, treacheries and vanity,
Lifetime crushes, shameful desires,
You will live your life disgracefully like we did,
In hard troubles, need and hunting.
Everything will fly by, rub away and be forgotten,
The human memory is a loose storage place,
All terms expired, but happiness would not come true.
And we are saying this with a bitter smile.

My mother worked for many years after my father died. She lived in Poltava communicating with her sisters, who didn't outlive my father for long. Only aunt Bertha lived a long life. She died in 2000. My mother passed away in 1992. She was buried near my father.

I remember discussions in the early 1950s about the forthcoming deportation of Jews to Birobijan [30](#), and transmission camps prepared for us: this was said in whispers talking in kitchens with the radios on to mute down the voices. I remember Stalin's death in March 1953, the mourning meeting in the central present Yevropeyskaya Square [Stalin's Square then] on 9 March, where there was his funeral in Moscow. It was raining, there was the morning music playing and many people sobbed. I was a little infected with this general tragic atmosphere, when my colleague Sergey Vysotskiy bent over me saying: 'But it is so great that he... died!' Few days after Stalin died we had a call from the hospital where Yelena used to work. Again, without explaining any reasons they offered her to come back to work.

Our life was gradually improving. Since 1948 I worked in the Design Machine tool Institute 'Giprostanok', and in 1953 I was promoted to chief of sector. In 1954 my Institute gave us a small two-bedroom apartment with 16 and 9 square-meter rooms. However, this was our own apartment, and I think that our life improved significantly from then on. In 1960 I went to work in the Academic Institute and entered an extramural postgraduate course in Moscow. In 1963 I defended a dissertation [31](#). I didn't face any prejudiced attitudes.

Our son was smart and sensitive. When he went to kindergarten, a boy called him 'zhyd' and I explained to him things about Jews, about our sad and great history, though I didn't focus his attention on the general tragic aspect of the nation, but Sasha began to understand things early. He had all excellent marks at school. Even if he had faced any abuses associated with national backgrounds, he didn't mention it to me. There was the atmosphere of friendship and trust between us, like there was in my father's house. We also socialized with our relatives. Once a year we visited my mother and aunts in Poltava. Ania's cousin sisters from Poltava and brother Yuriy from Moscow visited us. We also traveled to Moscow. We lived like all other Soviet intelligentsia families: from one pay day to another. We didn't have a car or a dacha, but our family spent vacations at the seashore in the Crimea or Caucasus every year.

In 1965 Alexandr finished school brilliantly. That year schools were switching to 10-year secondary education, and school children of the 11th and 10th forms graduated from schools which increased competition to colleges. Alexandr decided to enter Mechanic Machine Building Faculty in Moscow State University. We were surprised that he managed to enter it without any acquaintances or help. Many Jewish students joined Moscow University that year: the authorities must have

cancelled the quota of Jewish admission. Alexandr studied his first year in Moscow and then got a transfer to Kazan University for personal reasons. He studied well, but failed to enter a postgraduate course upon graduation from the University: this was another period of anti-Semitism. Alexandr obtained a job assignment free diploma, when he could find a job where he liked. He returned to Kiev, but he couldn't find work for a long time. Though he was a brilliant mathematician, he failed to get employment in the Institute of Cybernetics or Institute of Mathematic. Our acquaintances helped him to get a job at the Institute of Town Planning.

My acquaintance was acting director during his boss' absence. He employed my son. Alexandr helped many of his colleagues to defend their candidate and doctor dissertations: there was a trend to 'scientific' dissertations with computations. He also prepared a candidate dissertation. For a long time not one Scientific Council accepted his work. A chance helped us. My wife and I met a nice man during our vacation in Gagry. His name was Ilia Bolter, and he gave recommendations to my son to his friend in Moscow, professor, who helped our son to find a scientific tutor in Moscow and defend his dissertation. In 1978 Alexandr defended his candidate dissertation, and in 1988 he defended his doctor's dissertation.

In 1972 after finishing his college my son married Tatiana Zevakina, a Ukrainian girl. My wife and I bought a cooperative apartment for them on our saving and what we borrowed from our friends. In 1973 their son Dmitriy was born. In those years many Jews were moving to Israel and USA via Israel. Our acquaintances and distant relatives moved there as well. Of course, we were thinking of emigration, but we had heavy anchors: my wife's parents and my mother, and secondly, I was raised on the Russian culture. Of course, I know Western literature and jazz, but the Russian language and Russian classical music arm up my heart and it seemed hard to tear myself away from the homeland and Russian culture. I have no regrets about it.

Until the early 1990s I was chief of laboratory. I would have probably had a higher position had I been a member of the Party, but I never joined the party. Through all years of my engineering career I felt like writing, but writing something different from what the Soviet ideology appreciated, something that my heart suffered through. I started writing in the middle 1980s, and in 1990 the magazine 'Kiev' published my story 'Shadows on the snow' about the hard period of 1937. Once my wife's friend working at the Dovzhenko movie studio told us they were shooting a movie with a similar plot. She started to make inquiries at the studio, and then the authors of this film, producer Maschenko and script write Ivan Drach [editor's note: activists of Ukrainian culture, laureates of many awards, honored activists of arts] sent me a telegram asking me for a meeting. They signed a fake contract with me since the film as actually ready and my idea was practically emasculated. Moreover, I've never received any author's fees, they've just 'forgotten' about me. Perhaps, I should have sued them, but I did t differently: soon my novel where I am telling this story will be published.

In any case I am grateful to Gorbachev [32](#) and perestroika [33](#) for the opportunity to write and publish what you think, with no censorship, and the opportunity to read any books and listen to any music, for the freedom of faith and for the opening of the Jewish University in Kiev, for opening of synagogues and the opportunity for people of any religion to attend their temples. My family and I are convinced atheists. We do not attend any public or charity organizations. Thank God, we have everything we need, but I know that there are many needy people. It is wonderful that they can

have help.

I quit work a long time ago. My son became the first Rector of the Solomon University in Kiev [Jewish University in Kiev, established in 1995], at his friends' recommendation. It is the center of Jewish culture and history, but not only. Russian and Ukrainian intelligentsia representatives want to study here. My daughter-in-law Tatiana teaches German in the University. Our grandson Dmitriy finished the Construction College. He deals in TV management. He worked on television for some time, but now he also lectures at the university. My son is close to the Jewish culture: by spirit and by his current position, but like me he is attracted by the Russian and Ukrainian cultures. Therefore, my son's family does not consider emigration. My son believes that he will be useful for this new country - independent Ukraine that enabled Jews to develop their Jewish culture and identify themselves as a nation. I have my dearest great granddaughter Maria, whom I wish happiness in the country where she decides to live. Would also like to live longer and write few books: I have many thoughts and ideas.

Glossary:

1 Khrushchovka: Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in the new neighborhood of most Soviet cities.

2 Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940): Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Gangs: During the Russian Civil War there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

6 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.

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

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

10 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.

11 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.

[12](#) NKVD: People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

[13](#) Torgsin stores: Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

[14](#) Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934): Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

[15](#) Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940): Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

[16](#) Zinoviev-Kamenev triumvirate: After Lenin's death in 1924 communist leaders Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate and excluded Trotsky from the Party. In 1925 Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, who then joined Trotsky's opposition. Both Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the Party in 1927. They recanted, and were readmitted, but had little influence. In 1936 Zinoviev and Kamenev, along with 13 old Bolsheviks were tried for treason in the first big public purge trial. They confessed and were executed.

[17](#) 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.

[18](#) 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.

[19](#) Enemy of the people: Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

[20](#) Akhmatova, Anna (pen name of Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, 1888-1966): Russian poet, whose first book, *Evening* (1912), won her attention from Russian readers for its beautiful love lyrics. Akhmatova became a member of the Acmeist literary group in the same year and her second volume of poems, *Rosary* (1914) made her one of the most popular poetesses of her time. After 1922 it became difficult for her to publish as the Soviet government disapproved of her apolitical themes, love lyrics and religious motif. In 1946 she was the subject of harsh attacks by the Soviet cultural authorities once again, and she was only able to publish again under Khrushchev's regime.

[21](#) 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.

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

[23](#) Cossack: A member of a people of southern European Russia and adjacent parts of Asia, noted as cavalymen especially during tsarist times.

[24](#) Sholokhov, Mikhail Aleksandrovich (1905-1984): Russian novelist, whose multi-volume novel *The Quiet Don* is considered one of the most important literary works published since the Revolution of 1917. This masterpiece depicts the conflicting loyalties among the Don Cossacks during the Revolution and sold millions of copies in Russia and abroad. Sholokhov was elected to the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body of the nation and received the Order of Lenin in 1929. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1965.

[25](#) 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.

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

[27](#) 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'.

[28](#) Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi): Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

[29](#) 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.

[30](#) 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.

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

[32](#) Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-): Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

[33](#) 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.