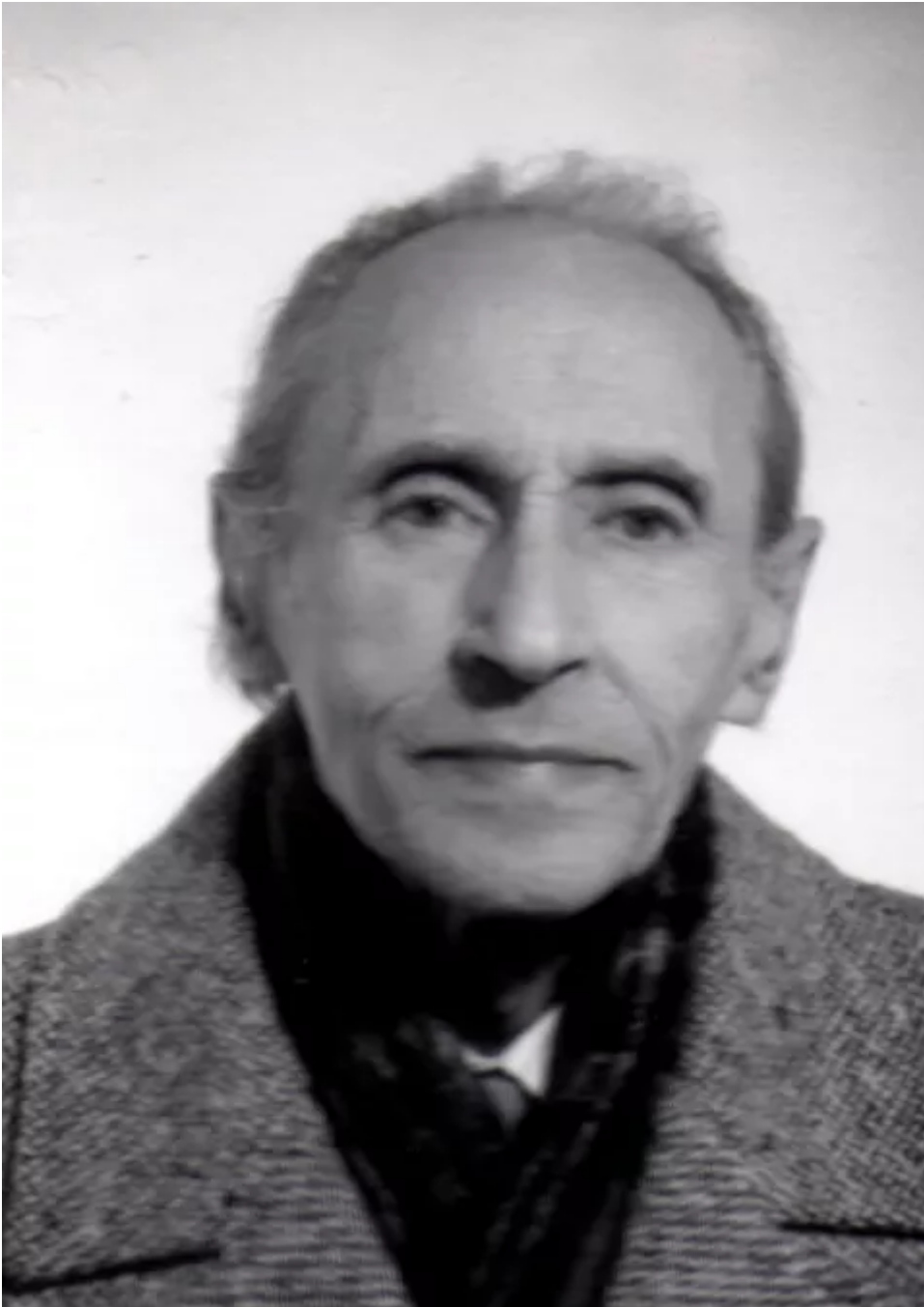


Nikolay Schwartz



This photo was taken for my passport, Uzhgorod, year 2003.

I retired in 1982. They were trying to convince me to stay at work, but I was already seriously ill. I had diabetes and had to keep to my diet and schedule my days. It was hard to follow my prescriptions at work. My sister was telling me to join them, but I didn't see any perspectives for myself. I should have moved there earlier, when I still could work and why would an old man want to emigrate? I am not used to be a dependent and receive what I didn't work for. I worked for my pension here in the USSR and didn't think it possible for me to receive alms in the USA. I spent much time with my grandchildren. I had time for reading. I had many books in Hungarian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English. I tried to read more to remember the languages.

When in the late 1980s perestroika began in the USSR. The freedom of speech that Gorbachev promised became a reality. There was no need to listen to western radios to hear the truth about the situation in the USSR. Newspapers began to publish articles describing our present and past life. The ban on religion was gone. People could go to church and celebrate religious holidays. However, in the course of Soviet rule people got so much out of this habit that at first there were not enough attendants for a minyan at the synagogue. Only few knew prayers and how to pray. Then chairman of the Jewish community of Uzhgorod suggested that I attended the synagogue. At first I went there to socialize and of course, to enable them to gather a minyan, but then it became a habit with me that developed into a need. In my childhood religion was a significant part of my life. When praying I recalled my parents, my childhood, my sisters and my brother. Every year I recited the Kaddish for my dear ones who had perished in the camp and for my deceased brother.

During perestroika citizens of the USSR got an opportunity to keep in touch with their friends and relatives living abroad. Correspondence was allowed and censorship of the mail was cancelled. It became possible to travel abroad or invite foreigners. In 1987 I visited my sister in Israel for the first time. Of course, I liked Israel very much.

After Ukraine gained independence the Jewish life had a rebirth. The Jewish community became stronger. People stopped hiding their Jewish identity. However, this refers to those Jews who had moved to Subcarpathia from other areas of the USSR since local Subcarpathian Jews have been open about their identity. More people began to attend the synagogue. Frankly, I don't believe them to be real Jews. There can be no Jew without cheder. As for those who had moved here, only Ukrainians called them 'zhydy', Jews. They have never been Jews for me. They don't know Hebrew or even Yiddish, they cannot recite a prayer and they don't know that before entering the synagogue they have to put on a hat, which is different from Christian traditions. Christians take off their hats before entering a temple. It's good that they teach young people in the Jewish school and in Hesed. At least our grandchildren will know what the Soviet power deprived our children of. In Hesed there are classes in Hebrew, Jewish traditions and history. Many young men and girls attend them. Regretfully, my son or grandchildren do not identify themselves as Jews and do not take part in those activities. Hesed works a lot for the restoration of the Jewry in Ukraine. It also helps old people to survive. I do not leave my home. I live alone and need help constantly. My son cannot spend much time with me. He brings me food before going to work in the morning and then he leaves. If it were not for the Hesed assistance, I would not survive. A nurse visits me every day and a doctor comes to see me once a week. They deliver meals to my home and buy medications. They also bring me Jewish newspapers and magazines. I am very grateful to all those who help me.