

Clara Shalenko

Clara Shalenko

Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ada Goldferb

Date of interview: January 2003

Clara Shalenko is an old, short and gray-haired woman. She is a very reserved person, but she enjoys telling the story of her life. She lives in a cozy and well-furnished one-room apartment. She keeps her apartment ideally clean. A year and a half ago Clara had an infarction. She hardly ever leaves her apartment. A volunteer from Gmilus Hesed visits her to help her wash and clean the apartment.

My great grandfather on my father's side Haim Shterbul was born in Odessa in 1845. I don't know what he did for a living. My grandfather's mother Esther (my great grandmother) was born in Odessa in 1850. She was a housewife. My great grandparents got married in 1868. They were religious and attended a synagogue on all Jewish holidays. They fasted at Yom Kippur. They had two sons: Leivi-Itzhok and Emmanuel. In 1898 my great grandparents moved to America. I don't know for what reason they moved or why they didn't take their sons with them. They lived in New York and my great grandfather owned a hockshop. In 1899 they mailed my grandfather Leivi-Itzhok a shiftcard' - a boat ticket to go to America, but my grandfather stayed at home since he had a family to take care of. His younger brother Emmanuel went instead. When Emmanuel arrived in America my great grandfather sent him back to Odessa 'I've called Leivi-Itzhok to come here. As for you, you should go back to Odessa'. Emmanuel returned to Odessa after a short stay in the US. This is all information I have about my great grandparents.

All I know about my grandfather on my father's side is what my father told me. My grandfather Leivi-Itzhok Shterbul was born in Odessa in 1869. He was a tall, handsome man with a moustache. On the only photo I have he has no beard. My grandfather was very religious. He had a tallit and teffilin. His friends came to see him at Sabbath holidays they went to a synagogue all together. My grandfather's family followed the kashrut. They had special utensils and dishes for Pesach and they had specific utensils for meat and dairy products. They fasted at Yom Kippur. They lived in Staroriznichnaya Street near Privoz [a popular market in Odessa]. They had two rooms and a kitchen. They were not a wealthy family. I believe my grandfather studied at cheder. My father didn't tell me about what he did either. My grandfather died in 1922. He was buried according to the Jewish traditions at the Jewish cemetery. I remember my grandfather's younger brother Emmanuel Shterbul. He was born in Odessa in 1872 and studied at cheder. He was a tinsmith. Emmanuel got married in 1899. His wife's name was Clara. Clara was a dressmaker. Emmanuel's family was religious. They went to synagogue and fasted at Yom Kippur. They always had matzah at Pesach. Since I didn't know any Jewish traditions in my childhood I didn't pay attention to any details and don't remember any. They had two children: Zina and Fima. Emmanuel and Clara died in evacuation during the Great Patriotic War.

My father's mother Reizl Shterbul was born in Odessa in 1878. I don't know her maiden name. She came from a religious family. She went to synagogue on Sabbath, and on big holidays. There was a number of synagogues in Odessa at that time. My grandmother got married in 1894 when she turned 16. She was a housewife. My grandmother celebrated all Jewish holidays and raised her children religious. . My grandmother Reizl died of infarction in 1922. My grandparents had four sons: my father Mendel was the oldest, then Abram, Obysh and Motl.

My father's brother Abram was born in Odessa in 1898. I don't know where he studied. He was a baker. Like other brothers he was a communist. I don't know for what reason they joined the Party. Perhaps, they were attracted by the idea of equality and justice proclaimed by Bolsheviks. All the communists were atheists. In 1919 Abram got married I do not know if he had a wedding in the synagogue. His wife Manya was a Jew and came from Lithuania. Manya was very religious and celebrated all holidays. She had a menorah and lit candles at Sabbath. She prayed and wore a shawl leaving her ears uncovered. I don't know whether there were any conflicts due to the spiritual difference since they were a separate family. Abram and Manya had four children. Manya wasn't raising her children religious. She did not take them to the synagogue, I do not know whether all of them observed kashrut in full extent, but they did not eat pork of course. They did not celebrate Jewish holidays at home but at Pesach they always had Gefilte fish and matzot. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War their family evacuated to Fergana where Abram continued to work as a baker. After he was appointed director of a bakery since he was a communist. Two of his sons were taken to the front from evacuation. After the war Abram became director of a bakery in Odessa. Later he was elected chairman of the regional committee of Trade Union of bakers where he worked until he retired. Manya died in 1980. Abram died in 1983. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery. Their daughter Sonya is an accountant, she lives in Odessa. She has two daughters Soya and Anya. Their older son Lyova and his family live in Chicago. Their middle son Volodya left for Israel where he died. Younger son Anatoliy live in Odessa, he has a daughter Natalia. I know all of them married Jews, while they all always felt themselves Jews. [Anti-Semitism increased in the USSR after WWII. In contrast to prewar period when the international marriages were popular, the Jews returned to their old practice - to marry Jews. They wanted to keep together.]

My father's brother Obysh was born in Odessa in 1901. He worked for trade unions and was single.. In 1941 Obysh went to the front where he perished.

My father's younger brother Motl was born in Odessa in 1905. He was a shoe modeler at a shoe factory. Motl got married in 1925. His wife's name was Adelia she was Jewish. In 1926 their son Lyova was born. He was named after grandfather Leivi-Itzhok. Motl went to the front in 1941 and his wife and son stayed in Odessa. Adelia and her son were killed in the ghetto in Odessa and Motl perished at the front.

My father Mendel Shterbul was born in Odessa on 3 January 1895. I know nothing about father's childhood. In 1914 he was recruited to the army. My father didn't go to the army, but got involved in some revolutionary activities and went underground. Therefore they made forged document for him with the name Finegold. He had this name all his life long. He was hiding at his friend Shymon Barskiy's apartment. In 1917 my father joined the Bolshevik Party. During the Civil War he was in the Bolshevik underground movement. In 1919 my father was sent to the town of Galatz in Romania to take money to Romanian communists for liberation of Russian communists from jail.

When my father came to the secret address there was an ambush of gendarmes. My father was scared to death. He had a lot of Party money with him. Gendarmes took my father to sigurantza [secret police of Romania] where they interrogated my father where he got such a lot of money from. My father replied that he was going to his father in the US and his relatives in Odessa collected this amount for his trip. He was imprisoned and convoyed to work every day. My father's job was to wallpaper rooms in a Romanian lord's mansion. Romanians Bolsheviks sent their messenger to my father. She called herself his fiancée and brought him food to jail. She managed to give him an escape plan. My father escaped at the time when he was at work at that mansion when his convoy dozed off. He met with Romanian communists at a secret apartment and they helped him to get back to Moscow. In Moscow my father entered the Communist University named after Ya. Sverdlov. His co-students were communists from many countries. My father remembered Anna Pauker [one of the leaders of Romanian communist movement, a Jew] – they were friends. He graduated from the Communist University in 1923 and was sent to do Party work in Odessa. The Party town committee of Odessa appointed my father a leader of the Party unit of the town mental hospital.

My mother's father Aron-Duvid Meyerovich was born in Odessa in 1879. I don't know where he lived or what he did for a living. He was religious, I don't know how much. My grandfather had a sister – Perl, born in 1876. She was very religious. Perl got married and lived a wealthy life. I don't know her husband's name or what he did for a living. They lived in Spiridonovskaya Street in the center of the town. She had two children: daughter Tsyliya and son Yasha. During the war they were in evacuation. Perl died in 1953 I have no information about her children. There is no information about where she was buried.

My mother's mother Haika Meyerovich was born in Odessa in 1886. I don't know her maiden name. My grandparents got married in 1903. My grandmother was a housewife. She wore kerchief. They followed the kashrut. In 1922 my grandfather Aron-Duvid and my grandmother starved to death in the hard times after the Civil War. Perl's husband was greedy and had no intention to help his wife's relatives. My mother didn't even mention this subject to me – she had too hard memories about this period. My grandparents had four children: two daughters – Zisl and Clara and two sons – Lyova and Isaac.

My mother's younger sister Clara was born in Odessa in 1907. She married David Waiss. David was a docker in the port, he was leader of a crew of loaders. They lived in Miasoyedovskaya Street in Moldavanka. Clara and David had three children: daughter Lena and sons Ilia and Shura. Before the Great Patriotic War Clara gave birth to another girl. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War her husband went to the front. Clara was confused. She sent her older daughter with her husband's sister in evacuation to Samarkand. Clara sent Ilia and Shura to a children's home that evacuated to the Krasnodar region. On the way there they were captured by Germans. Germans exterminated all Jewish children. Clara and her baby stayed in Odessa where they were killed in the ghetto. Clara's husband perished at the front. Of all family only their older daughter Lena survived. After the Great Patriotic War Lena returned to Odessa, got married and had two daughters. Lena died of breast cancer in 1990. Her daughters moved to Israel. I have no further information about them.

I know little about my mother's brothers. Her older brother Lyova was born in Odessa in 1910. I don't know where he worked. He was single. He perished at the front during the Great Patriotic

War. Her younger brother Isaac was born in 1912. He was also single. He perished at the front during the war.

My mother Zisl Meyerovich was born in Odessa in 1905. My mother didn't tell me much about her childhood. I only know that she lived in the family of her father's sister Perl's since she turned 12. She worked as a housemaid cleaning the apartment and doing the washing and laundry. I don't know where her sisters and brothers were at that time, but my mother told me that she was supporting them as much as she could. During the period of famine she gave them food leftovers. She had to do it in secret since Perl's husband was greedy and had no intention to help his wife's relatives. I don't know where my mother studied, but she could read and write in Russian and Yiddish. At 18 she went to work as a nurse at the town mental hospital in Slobodka in 1923. My mother was a pretty girl – she had thick beautiful hair.

My father met my mother there and they fell in love with one another. They got married in 1923, but they didn't have a wedding party since life was hard and they couldn't afford it. My father and mother were 'kaptans' [very poor in Yiddish] they just had a civil ceremony. They got a room with a kitchen and toilet for medical personnel in the hospital where they worked. After the wedding my father insisted that my mother got some medical education and she finished a school of medical nurses at the mental hospital in Odessa in 1924. She began to work as a medical nurse at this hospital. I remember well two of my mother's friends: Gitia and Katia. They were Jewish and worked as doctors at the mental hospital. They often visited us and we got together to celebrate birthdays and soviet holidays: the October Revolution Day and the 1st of May. On these days we went on march with the red banners and Communist slogans, there played music people sang songs everybody was happy. Afterwards the families with the friends got together at the dinner table. Gitia stayed in Odessa during the Great Patriotic War and was killed in the ghetto. I have no information about what happened to Katia.

I was born on 15 November 1925. I was the only child of my parents and they spoiled me a lot, of course. In 1930 my mother went to work as surgical nurse in the clinic of Professor Nalivkin in Slobodka. She worked there until 1934. My mother had good working relationships with her colleagues and she didn't face any anti-Semitism. In 1934 she went to work at the military hospital in Yasnaya Street. My father was a secretary of Party unit at the plant named after Khvorostin in 1932-1933 [secretaries of Party units were responsible for implementation of the policy of the Communist Party, Party meetings and collection of monthly fees].

He got an apartment in Bazarnaya Street in the center of the town. It was a communal apartment and there was another tenant in it. We all were good neighbors. We had two rooms, and a common kitchen and a toilet. The apartment was heated with wood. I had a desk, a bed and many Russian fiction books in my room. My parents had a wardrobe with a mirror, a big bed and a chest of drawers. My father and mother were very much in love with one another and loved me dearly. Our home was warm and cozy. My mother cooked delicious food and also, made traditional Jewish food. She made tsymes, gefilte fish and baked strudels. We went to parades on Soviet holidays and had guests. My father and mother were communists – therefore, we didn't celebrate Jewish holidays. However, we always had matzah at Pesach since my mother's brother Abram worked as baker at a Jewish bakery before holidays. We had many Jewish neighbors before the war. Adults spoke Yiddish and children communicated in Russian. My mother and father also spoke Yiddish in our family. I

can understand Yiddish, but I cannot speak it well. There was a Jewish theater in Troitskaya Street in Odessa. Yudia, a daughter of our acquaintances, was an actress in this theater, she was very pretty. My parents and I often went to this theater. My father sang me songs in Yiddish. I don't remember my parents to speak about Jewry or Judaism at home though.

In 1933 my father became secretary of the Party unit in the children's recreation center of general type in Kholodnaya Balka, a smaller town in 10 km from Odessa. He commuted to work every day I spent my summer vacations at the recreation center. There was a big park in the recreation center and children were well fed: I enjoyed my time there. My father and I stayed there through a summer and my mother visited us at weekends. I made friends with children of my father's colleagues. I remember children of my father's colleagues Mark Krieger and Luba Voitushka. Mark was a Jew and Luba was Russian. We played a ball, hide-and-peek, and climbed trees and walked. After the Great Patriotic War Luba lived in Slobodka neighborhood in Odessa, but I have no information about Mark Krieger.

I remember 1933, (I was 8 years old) when I saw many people swollen from starvation in the streets – they scared me and I ran away. Our family was in a better condition since my father was a Party activist. Party officials received food packages – I remember how delicious was khalva [oriental sweet mix of nuts, seeds and sugar]. There was a so-called old market in Bazarnaya Street. We, children, went to see people selling slices of bread and meat. We could only afford staring at it since it was way too expensive for our parents to buy. There were many such traders that took advantage of other people's misfortunes.

In 1933 I went to a Russian school where we also studied Polish. There were Jewish and Russian children at school, but I don't remember any Polish children. I remember Nora Kuzmenko, a Russian girl. She was an anti-Semite. She used to say 'Jew, you should die!' Few Polish teachers were also anti-Semites. They treated us with disdain. I became a young Octobrist at school. In 1935 I became a pioneer. We had pioneer meetings and helped other pupils with their classes and did some chores for older people. We had weekly meetings when our pioneer tutor told us about pioneers and about Pavlik Morozov.

I attended an embroidery and sewing class at school. I had a friend – Raya Khomskaya that was my neighbor. Her father was a plumber. I don't remember whether her parents observed Jewish traditions, but she knew more about them than I. She and I used to go to the synagogue in Meschanskaya Street not far from our house just of pure interest. In 1930s the town authorities began to close synagogues. There were few synagogues in Odessa before the Great Patriotic War. I remember a synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street and the synagogue in Ekaterininskaya Street. It was forbidden for the members of pioneer organisation to visit churches or synagogues and I ceased to.

Raya's father had nothing to do with politics, but he was arrested and executed in 1937 [Great Terror]. I don't know what was he accused of. Raya, her sister and mother lost their breadwinner. Their Jewish neighbors supported them continuously. Raya became a hairdresser after the war.

I also remember my father's friend Shymon Barskiy arrested in Moscow in 1937. My father and Shymon were in the same Party unit in Odessa. Later Shymon moved to Moscow. My father in 1937 got a subpoena to the NKVD office, where he was interrogated about where he was in 1921 – 1922. He was suspected of espionage due to his short-term stay in Romania during the Civil War. We were concerned about what might happen to my father, but he managed all right.

On Sunday 22 June 1941 I was cleaning the house when I heard on the radio that the war began. I didn't know what a war was like and didn't listen to details. On 23 July Odessa began to be bombed. I saw splinters of shells falling on the pavement. Children used to collect them.

We evacuated at the end of July 1941. My father was responsible for evacuation of children from the recreation center where he was secretary of the Party organization. There were children from many towns. My father also took his brother Abram and his family and me to evacuation. My mother was working at a military hospital and she couldn't go with us. We boarded railroad platforms for transportation of cattle. We didn't go far from Odessa when German planes began to drop bombs on our train. The children ran to hide in surrounding bushes and my father was trying to keep them together. My father was wearing white pants and other adults yelled at him 'White pants, you decamouflage us - they will start bombing again'. My father didn't have any clothing to change, though. The train and the rails were not damaged, we moved on. Uncle Abram and his family and I stayed with some relatives in Artyomosvsk [570 km to the northwest of Odessa]. My father and children went to the next station of Debaltsevo - to take children to the children's home there. We stayed few weeks in Artyomovsk having no information about my father. Since the frontline was getting closer we left Artyomovsk to go further to the east. We went by freight train and it was a hard trip. We came to Buguruslan [1 700 km from Odessa] of Orenburg region from where we were taken to Bolshoye Kuroedovo village on horse-driven carts. We were accommodated in a hut in the woods near the village. The only food we had were pickled mushrooms in a barrel. Later chairman of the collective farm of the village accommodated us in the house of Julia, a village woman whose husband was at the front. There were a number of us: five children and my aunt and uncle. We got a job - we picked raspberries. I got a horse and a cart to transport boxes with raspberries to the collective farm. There was lack of food. Julia made pies stuffed with onions from dark flour and this was the food we had. We didn't have winter clothing and villagers were so poor that they didn't have any clothes to share with us. The only support the chairman of the collective farm could provide was to help us move from there. In October 1941 we left for Fergana [3 000 km from Odessa in Uzbekistan] a small dusty town of one-storied mud-houses. In Fergana my uncle Abram went to work at the bakery. He was a communist and was appointed director of the bakery. Life was very hard and we starved. Abram's wife Manya said to me 'Clara, you are a big girl and it is hard for us to provide for you. Go to the Party town committee and tell them to accommodate you since you've lost your parents'. The town committee sent me to the town industrial association where I got a bed in a hostel - there were two other girls in the room. They were in evacuation, but they were not Jewish. We were sewing winter coats for the front, but we still earned a little and had little food. We got a piece of bread, boiled water, tea and few raisins in the canteen. I had no information about my father or mother and missed them a lot.

My father went to the front at the beginning of autumn 1941 after he left all children in the children's home. He wrote a letter to Artyomovsk, but it didn't reach us. My father was at the front and didn't have any information about my mother or me for two years. In 1943 my father was severely wounded - his jaw was injured. He had to wear a bandage for the rest of his life. He was demobilized and began searching for my mother and me. He found out through the evacuation agency that the hospital where my mother was working had moved to the Krasnodar region. He got information from an evacuation agency that the hospital where mother worked in Odessa moved to Krasnodar region where it was disbanded. My father found my mother in Arkhangelskaya village in

Krasnodar region. She worked as a medical nurse there. My mother and father went to Stalinabad [Dushanbe from 1961, 3 250 kms from Odessa]. My mother got a job at the medical unit of railroad agency. My father was very shy about his injured jaw and just went to work as a house-painter – he didn't go to see any Party officials to ask about a position. My mother received a one-room apartment with all comforts. Through this whole period my parents were trying to find me. Once, when my parents were standing in line to get some kerosene, they began talking to a Jewish couple. Those people knew uncle Abram and told my parents that he was in Fergana. My father immediately wrote to the director of bakery in Fergana since he knew that my uncle was a baker. This director of bakery happened to be Abram. He replied 'Mendel, come here – Clara is with us'.

At the beginning of the fall of 1943 my father arrived to take me to Stalinabad. I was my parents' only treasure and they hadn't known anything about me for two years. When my mother saw me at the railway station she fainted. We were so happy to be together again. I went to study at the medical school in Stalinabad and finished it in 1944. Many graduates of our school went to the front. I got a job assignment to a hospital in a small town of Khorog in the mountains near the border with Afghanistan. I worked there with my schoolmate Luba Dymshytz and her sister Rosa. They evacuated from Gomel. Rosa learned the Tadjyk language and worked as an accountant for chairman of the collective farm. She was a smart and intelligent girl. She could also ride a horse. Luba and I went around the neighboring villages riding a donkey to inoculate children from smallpox. The local Tadjyk people treated us well. They gave us food since we were always hungry. I remember baked pumpkin that we got from them. We lived in jurta [portable Tadjik dwelling from felt round in perimeter, with a cupola-shaped roof]. Tadjyk people took their children to get treatment. We made inoculations and gave them medications, mainly quinine since many of them had malaria. I also had malaria. I worked in Khorog for about a year. In summer 1945 I returned to my parents in Stalinabad. In the end of August we went to Odessa via Moscow. We arrived in Moscow at the beginning of September. My parents and I were in the Red Square when the radio announced that the war with Japan was over. People rejoiced.

We arrived in Odessa in autumn 1945. My father became a crew leader – they built a department store in Pushkinskaya Street. Our house was ruined. Our former janitor told us that there was a vacant apartment in the same neighborhood where we moved in. It was a dark two-room apartment on the first floor – no kitchen or toilet. My father, being a construction man, built a verandah, toilet and a bathroom. My mother continued to work as a medical nurse in the municipal vegetation trust. There were no Jewish schools or Jewish theater in Odessa after the war. Jewish culture was in decay and suppressed. I think there was a synagogue in Pushkinskaya Street before 1953.

In 1945 I went to work as a medical nurse at the vitamin manufacture factory. In 1946 I entered the construction college. There were many Jewish students there. In 1947 I became a Komsomol member. There was anti-Semitism after the war. However, our acquaintances treated us well. Quite a few lecturers in our college were anti-Semites. One of them Vlad Maximovich Shakhiev, an Azerbaidjan man, called me Finegold-Minegold [Fine gold means 'fine gold' and Minegold means 'my gold' – he was probably joking in his own manner.] There was famine in 1946. There were plenty of food products in the Privoz [main market of Odessa], but who could afford to buy them? I remember that our food was corn pudding or frozen potatoes. We bought a small piece of meat just to make soup once a week. There were coupons to receive bread. Bread was weighed in small

slices and there were even smaller pieces of it added to make up the standard weight. We used to eat those pieces on our way home. When at home we divided or rationed slices of bread to last for a day. Students received food coupons to get meals at the canteen. We didn't have enough clothes either. Americans sent humanitarian aid. I remember I was given a dress. It was checked one with the white collar. I can't recall now who and how distributed such things. I finished the Construction College in 1949.

In 1949 I went to work in Sevastopol upon finishing College [there was a system of mandatory employment of graduates from higher and secondary special educational institutions in the USSR and they were obliged to work a certain period]. I met a young Russian Navy officer. We met at a dancing party at the Navy Officers' House. I introduced him to my parents before we got married. He made a good impression on them and they had no objections to my marrying a Russian man. . His name was Vladimir Georgievich Shalenko. We got married in 1950. My husband was born in the town of Shuya, Ivanovo region, in 1923. He had a mother and two sisters. During the Great Patriotic War he studied at the Higher Engineering School in Leningrad. He participated in the parade of Victory in Moscow. I was a construction technician in a military unit in Sevastopol – we built houses for officers. My husband was a lieutenant. We had a big 3-room apartment with all comforts in Sevastopol where my mother-in-law lived I got along well with her. We didn't have any children. There were few Jewish officers in the military unit. We often got together to talk about life telling Jewish jokes and trying to keep some sort of relationship atmosphere. My husband never cared about my Jewish nationality. Don't know whether there was a synagogue in Sevastopol.

I remember the period of the 'doctors' plot'. I went to see my parents in summer 1953 and wanted to enter the Odessa Medical Institute. I wasn't even allowed to take entrance exams, since there was my maiden name – Finegold in all documents about my secondary education. . We heard rumors about deportation of Jews to Siberia and were very concerned about it. When Stalin died I was in grief, cried and even joined the Communist party. My mother couldn't care less about it and my father just said 'Thank God, this Osetin man left this Earth'. My father recalled when he was interrogated in the NKVD office. He was glad that Stalin died.

When Khrushchev came to power we believed what he said about Stalin's criminality and his promises of a better life. Khrushchev started extensive housing construction in order to give families separate apartments. Many families in Odessa received apartments, therefore, many people believed in him, but he lacked education that was clear from his speeches and actions.

My husband died in 1963 after happy 14 years of life together. I moved to Odessa. We exchanged apartments and my parents and I got a two-room apartment with all comforts on the first floor in a new neighborhood of the town. I was having a hard time after my husband died and led a secluded life. My parents did their best to support me. In the evening we watched TV and read books. We were moderately well off: I received a salary of a Soviet engineer and my parents received pensions. We didn't have a dacha [summer house] or a car. I worked as a safety engineer in the town construction trust for twenty years. I didn't have any problems with getting employment, but many Jews did. They were offered jobs that Russians didn't want. I had good relationships at work and went along well with both Russians and Jews. There was no anti-Semitism in my environment, but of course, Jews were more familiar to me. We had a good understanding and took up the meaning of what one wanted to say quickly. I had friends and celebrated soviet holidays and

birthdays together with them at the festal table. We went to the cinema, theatre, on trips. At Pesach we visited each other and had matzah, but we gave very slight religious overtone to it, I guess.

I remember when Jews began to move to Israel, our historical Motherland, in 1976. I attended Party meetings where communists blamed Jews for leaving the USSR. Back in 1948 when Palestine became Israel my father told me about the history of Palestine with enthusiasm. He was very pleased that Jews gained a Motherland and hoped that life would become easier for many of us since we've got our own country. My father told me it was better for Jews to live together; therefore, I was loyal to those that left the country. I never spoke against Jews at such Party meetings. We had deputy party leader that was a Jew and adamantly blamed Jews that were leaving calling them traitors and holding them up to shame. In few years' time he left to the US with his family. We didn't go to Israel since my parents were old and didn't feel well. I sympathize with the families that leave this country and feel concerned about the troublesome situation in Israel.

A common engineer could afford to travel in the Soviet Union in 1960s – 1970s I traveled a lot when I worked I dropped by a synagogue in every town I went to for pure interest.

In 1969 I was in Budapest. Since I didn't speak Hungarian the guide explained to me how to get to a synagogue. When I came there a shames opened the door for me. It was evening and a redhead boy was saying a prayer standing in a kippah. Other Jews surrounding him were listening. Then the shames showed me a big hall of the synagogue (he and I spoke Yiddish). When we entered there I was stupefied: there was white marble and oak wood all around. The shames showed me where the Torah was kept. Then he took me into the backyard of the synagogue to show graves of tsadiks that were buried there. At the end of our meeting he said he was very pleased that a Jewish woman from Odessa showed interest in Hungarian Jews.

My mother died of heart problems in December 1977. My father died in January 1978 – in a month after my mother passed away. My parents were buried at the town cemetery since the Jewish cemetery was closed for burials due to its 'overpopulation'. Only those whose closest relatives were buried at this cemetery were allowed to be buried there. I went to the synagogue when I was in Tbilissi in 1979 and ordered a memorial prayer for my parents.

In 1989 I visited my friend Sopha Lutza in the US. She lives in New York. Sopha took me to the Jewish cemetery of Yablochkov in New York where her little granddaughter was buried. I traveled to other towns in the US. I particularly remember Boston where many of my acquaintances from Odessa reside. We got together to go to synagogue.

Since 1985 I've attended the synagogue regularly. I went to the synagogue at Yom Kippur, Pesach and Simkhat-Torah. The Jewish life has revived in Odessa after perestroika. I am very interested in the Jewish history. I feel very much a Jew and I am proud to be a Jew. The attitude towards Jews has changed – we have a higher status now. Things have undoubtedly become easier for us.

There were Representative offices of Sokhnut and Joint established in Odessa, the Cultural Center of Israel opened and there are two Jewish newspapers published and Jewish TV programs broadcast. I receive Jewish newspapers and read Jewish books. I borrow books from a Jewish library in Odessa. I gave books by Jewish writers that I had to the library of 'Gmilus-Hesed', but I keep my favorite book of Joseph Utkin, a poet that wrote in Russian. He perished during the Great Patriotic

War. I like his poem 'The story of Motel the Redhead' about Motel, a Jewish man.

I live alone. I get assistance from Gmilus Hesed. Once a month I receive food packages. A volunteer from there spends with me 3 hours per week. She is a very nice woman. She even stays longer than 3 hours. She cleans my apartment, washes me and buys potatoes and bread. She tells me about her granddaughter that studies at a Jewish school and has a good conduct of Hebrew. I've had an infarction and it has become a problem to me to go to the synagogue. My acquaintance Arkadiy Shoihet attends a synagogue every day for a morning prayer. He is eighty years old. He brings me news from the synagogue. Before I fell ill sometimes curator from Gmilus Hesed called me to invite to the theater or to a tour with groups of Jews. There were 15 of us on that tour. We went to the places related to the Jewish history in our town. We took pictures. I remember going to the synagogue in Evreyskaya Street that was returned to the Jewish community few years ago. I lost my breath so strong the spirit of the Jewish atmosphere was there. It was refurbished in such a wonderful way. Jews leave their books of prayers on their seats and they remain there until they come next time. Jews are alive and will live.