

Mina Smolianskaya Biography

Mina Smolianskaya

Chernovtsy

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Mina Smolianskaya lives in a quiet street of private cottages in the center of Chernivtsy. She lives on the 2nd floor of a two-storied house with a spiral staircase. Actually it is rather an attic than a 2nd floor. She accommodated there with her husband after the war and raised their three sons there. Smolianskaya is a short old bow-backed woman. She is lame and has to walk with a stick. She has a clear mind regardless of her age. Although her age shows – she is blind in one eye, has a poor hearing and her arms are deformed by polyarthritis. However, she manages to do without any help. She was very proud to show me her barrels with sauerkraut and pickles. She has jars of jam on the shelves. She doesn't want meals provided by Hased and refuses from the help of a coming in nurse. Se says she will feel herself a helpless old woman if somebody else came to do the housework. It is amazing how she manages things by herself. She listens to tapes of Jewish writers and Jewish music. Volunteers come to read newspapers to her.

I know very little about my father's parents. They lived in the town of Pliskov, Berdichev district, Vinnitsa region. My grandfather Zus Smolianskiy died when my father was 3 years old. My grandmother Hana came from Pliskovo. She raised four children. My father was the youngest in the family. My grandmother didn't remarry. They were very poor, almost starving. The children wore each other's clothing until they became worn out. I remember my grandmother's small house with thatched roof and low ceilings. There was a very small vegetable garden near the house. My grandmother grew vegetables to support the family. She also earned her living by sewing. She made skirts, aprons, pillowcases and sheets for peasant women. In her family they spoke Yiddish and she spoke Ukrainian to her neighbors and customers. The children grew up and left their family and town. I have no information about them.

My father Nuhim Smolianskiy was born in Pliskovo in 1880s. I don't know the exact date of his birth – I just made calculations knowing when and at what age he died. My grandmother Hana told me that he studied at cheder and read a lot. He borrowed books from melamed, as my grandmother didn't have money to buy books. My father wanted to become a lawyer. There were very few educated people at that time. My mother, for example, had no education. My father came from a very poor family that couldn't afford to pay for his studies even though he was eager to study. Besides, he was a Jew and there was admission restriction of 5% for Jews willing to enter higher educational institutions. This 5% were boys from rich families. My father was advised to be baptized if he wanted to study, but he refused. He had to give up his dreams and became an apprentice of a carpenter. He became professional and earned good money. My mother told me that my father liked to dress up like a town man after work. He wore suits and vests, white shirts and a hat. He was a handsome tall man with fair hair and gray eyes. My father was raised religious. My grandmother always celebrated Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

My mother Haya, was born in Odessa in 1890s. I don't know her exact birth date. My mother had two older brothers, Ershl and Shyka and a sister, Tzypa. My mother was the youngest. Their parents died when my mother was just a child. I don't know why my mother's parents died. I know that my mother father's name was Zus. My mother was raised in the family of her older brother Ershl. His family wasn't fanatically religious, but they observed traditions and celebrated holidays. He was much older than my mother and had a big family. They were very poor. My mother felt very uncomfortable in his family. She was not welcome and her brother's wife called my mother a sponger and was very greedy. My mother didn't get enough food and didn't have a chance to study. My mother couldn't wait to leave her brother's family.

My mother's brother Shyka moved to Vinnitsa from Odessa after his parents died. He worked there to support the rest of his family. In 1930s he returned to Odessa to reunite with his family. He stayed to live in Odessa. My mother's sister Tzypa died before the war. She was ill (and was taken to hospital in Kiev to have a surgery. She died in this hospital in Kiev.

My mother told me how she met my father. Her sister Tzypa had married a baker and moved to live with him in the village of Pliskovo. Her husband's last name was Bluvstein. My grandmother Hana and her children lived near Tzypa's husband's bakery and so my mother met her future husband at the bakery. My mother was so eager to leave her brother's family that she accepted my father's proposal without any further considerations. They got married in 1912. They had a Jewish wedding in Pliskovo. My mother moved to her husband's small house near the house of my grandmother.

There were 6 children in our family. The older sister Rulia was born in a year after my parents got married - in 1913. I was born in 1914. My Jewish name is Mindl. My sister Surah was born in 1915. Surah was an invalid. When she was a baby my mother dropped her and my sister injured her leg. Her parents only noticed that there was something wrong with her leg when she began to walk, but there was no opportunity to get her proper treatment in the village and she remained lame. My sister Donia was born in 1916. Then, in 1917 my parents had a son Joseph. The youngest Fania was born in 1918. Soon after Fania was born our father fell ill with typhoid and died in 1918. Fania was 3 months old when he died. I remember when my father was dying my mother was standing beside his bed crying "Nuhim, why are you leaving me with six children? What am I going to do with the children? I wish I were in your shoes. What am I going to do with six children?" My father's mother Hana, a very smart and considerate woman, was standing there, too. She was also a widow and raised her children all by herself. She was telling my mother that she had to think about the children, but my mother kept crying and screaming. She was just a housewife and had no idea how she was going to earn her living. Fania was in the pram in the kitchen and was all forgotten about. Nobody came to look at the baby in two days of the funeral proceedings, but Fania survived.

My grandmother Hana helped my mother to raise the children. My grandmother was a tall woman and had a very straight bearing even when she carried heavy loads. She looked very serious, but she was very tender with her grandchildren. I don't know whether my grandmother had gray hair - she always wore a kerchief. She wore log dark skirts and dark long-sleeved blouses. I loved my grandmother dearly.

We spoke Yiddish in the family and Ukrainian with our Ukrainian neighbors. There were many Jewish families in Pliskovo. There was a synagogue, cheder and a Jewish school. Jews in Pliskovo had a very strong community. There were few rich families, but the majority were well-to-do people

that worked hard to provide for their families. There were also poor families like our family of a widow raising her children. Our neighbors were helping us. They gave us chicken on holidays and clothes of their children. Every now and then they invited us to treat us to some delicious food.

My mother and father when he was still alive, always celebrated Shabbat and all Jewish holidays. They went to synagogue at Saturday. My mother and father had a pew at the synagogue. I remember how my parents went to synagogue at Rosh Hashanah. After my mother returned home she honeyed all corners in the house with a goose feather for the coming year to be sweet. We celebrated Jewish holidays at home in a very conventional way. We couldn't afford festive dinners or gifts, as we were very poor. My mother and grandmother lit candles and prayed on holidays and we had our everyday food of potatoes and vegetables. However, we celebrated Pesach. Tzypa's husband owned a bakery where he had a matzah baking unit. He always had a bigger workload before Pesach, as he had to make matzah for all Jewish families in Pliskovo and the surrounding villages. Jews brought their own flour to have matzah made for them. Members of our family also spent all our time at the bakery to help them with their work. My mother made dough for matzah. She weighed 5 kg of matzah adding some water, stirred the mixture and put it on the table for men to knead the dough. I was responsible for sieving the flour. In this way I earned my gift for Pesach. People paid bakers for their work and the owner of the bakery told them that a widow and her child were working with them and people paid my mother and me few kopeks. Also, all employees got matzah as a reward. My mother liked to make things from matzah and so do I.

My mother always tried to cook something special at Pesach. We also had fancy dinnerware and kitchen utensils on the attic. If we didn't have enough utensils we took our everyday pieces to the river to scrub them with sand and wash them in the flowing water and only then these utensils could be used for cooking at Pesach. My mother used to save from whatever little we had for living to buy chicken and fish at Pesach. We had chicken broth and Gefilte fish, potato and matzah puddings at Pesach. My mother also made strudels with jam and raisins and honey cakes. At Pesach we visited my grandmother Hana. She always expected her grandchildren and made a lot of food. She always had gifts for us. At Purim my grandmother always made gomentashy - triangle pies with poppy seeds. All members of the family fasted 24 hours at Yom Kippur. Sometimes richer families sent us a chicken at Yom Kippur. It was a live chicken. They performed a ritual of Kapores turning a chicken over their heads saying that this chicken was to be their atonement. Later they were supposed to give this chicken to a poor family. Sometimes we even had few chicken at Yom Kippur.

We didn't keep livestock or had vegetable garden at Pliskovo. All Jews in Pliskovo were handicraftsmen. Ukrainian lived in the outskirts of the town where they did farming. We were friends with Ukrainian children and nationality didn't matter to us. My mother earned her living by making skirts and aprons and embroidered blouses and towels for Ukrainian women. She earned very little and we lived from hand to mouth. We didn't even have enough bread. Mother used to bake bread for the family once a week. Once my mother's sister Tzypa visited us and saw me eating a piece of bread. She reprimanded my mother telling her that she shouldn't allow us to nibble on bread between meals. Mother took bread to the storeroom and locked it. We, kids, were desperately hungry. We broke the lock to get this bread. Mother told us off later, but stopped locking bread. Life was very hard when I was a child...

During the war of 1914-1918 there were gangs (1) coming to our town. We hid on the attic and were so afraid that Fania would cry and bandits would find us. I also remember Petlura (2) when he rode into our town on his horse. He wore a cloak and demanded that people gave him money. I remember that the power switched from one political party to another. There were Polish and Denikin (3) units. Denikin units were killing Jews, and who weren't? We managed to hide so that they didn't find us, but many of our neighbors suffered. They were robbed and beaten and many of them were killed.

There was a Jewish and Ukrainian school in Pliskovo. My older sister Rulia was very smart. She went to a Ukrainian school, because my mother wanted her to get further education and decided that it was going to be easier for her if she studied Ukrainian. My younger sisters and I went to the Jewish school located across the street from our home. We studied grammar, reading and mathematic in Yiddish. Rulia and I had one pair of boots. She wore them to school and I was waiting at home until she came from school and I could wear the boots to attend the remaining classes at my school.

When I was in the 6th form director called me and told me that I shouldn't attend school any longer. I didn't understand. I thought that my teacher might have complained to him that I had lice. But all children had lice at that time and they were allowed to attend school. When I came to school on the following day director saw me and told me stay away from school. I went home and complained to my mother that director told me to go home. My mother said "Daughter, when you get married and your husband will go to the army you will be able to write him a letter, won't you? 6 years at school is enough for you and now you will become apprentice to a dressmaker. Later I found out that my mother had asked director to tell me to stop attending school. She believed that I had to help her about the house. So, my studies ended when I was 12, but I managed all right in my life without education.

I went to a dressmaker Khone-Rukhl, a Jewish woman, to learn a profession. She was a widow and had two children. Her older daughter also helped her sewing. At the beginning I did minor sewing errands and looked after the dressmaker's younger son. She gradually involved me into more important work and soon I learned to make aprons, skirts and blouses.

In 1927 our family moved to Chorniavka, a Ukrainian village in 40 km from Pliskovo. I stayed in Pliskovo for some time while learning dressmaking before 1929. My mother and siblings had a vegetable garden and kept a cow and chickens. We lived in a small lop-sided house. The village authorities gave my mother a cow to help a widow with six children to feed her family. We all, even the youngest Fania, were helping our mother. We took the cow to the pasture, fed the chickens and weeded and watered the garden. There were only two Jewish families in the village: our family - the poorest in the village, and the family of storeowner Shloime - the richest family in the village. Shloime was selling food, garments and soap in his store. My mother worked at the collective farm storeroom patching bags. I lived with my grandmother Hana, but later I moved to Chorniavka. When I was leaving my grandmother Hana gave me her sewing machine and I could take orders. I got my first clients. They were paying me with food products for my work. When I came to Chorniavka a collective farm was organized there. My mother joined the collective farm and their condition was to have me work at the collective farm, too.

There was no synagogue in the village. On Saturday my mother worked at the collective farm. On big holidays my mother didn't go to work. We had a Jewish calendar at home and my mother

always knew the dates of holidays. She said it was sinful to work on big holidays. We didn't have any celebrations, though, just took a rest. My mother embroidered blouses and towels for farmers at home and worked from morning till 6pm patching bags at the storeroom. She received flour or grain for this work. I worked at the sugar factory not far from the village in autumn and went to the field to pick peas and weed sugar beets. My older sister Rulia worked at the sugar factory in the village of Skomoroska in 7 km from Chorniavka. She stayed there during the week living in a barrack and came home at weekends. The rest of children were at home. Our mother boiled or baked potatoes that we ate during a day. Donia, Joseph and Fania went to a Ukrainian school in the village. Surah didn't go to school. She had no education.

In Pliskovo I became a pioneer. In Chorniavka I became a Komsomol member. Komsomol members were called the leading unit of young people and I wanted to be part of this leading and advanced unit to be a part of builders of the happy communist society. I believed in it. There was no anti-Semitism at that time. We attended Ukrainian weddings and christening parties. Once our Komsomol crew had to go to another village to help them with sugar beets planting. There were about 30 of Komsomol members in our crew. We went to the village of Molokhov where secretary of the district committee appointed me to be the leader of the crew. We went to the collective farm where Chairman asked us how many people were in the crew. One Komsomol member that was angry that I was appointed the leader of the crew rather than he (he believed he deserved it) replied "there are 29 of us and one "zhydovka". He meant to say "crew leader", but blabbed the wrong word in agitation. Such conduct was abusive and subject to punishment at that time. Chairman of the collective farm took this Komsomol member and me to the Komsomol district committee office where we were interrogated about the situation. The secretary asked my opinion about the incident and I replied that it was all right and I forgave this young man. I didn't want this young man to respond for his thoughtlessness and we were released.

I didn't quite get along with my older sister Rulia. I was cheerful and she was different. She wouldn't look at people when walking along the street. I had many friends, acquaintances and admirers. My sister wanted to get married before I did. If I was buying something for the money I earned she demanded that I gave it to her. I had some savings when a neighbor told me that there was plush sold in the village store. I ran there and bought a cut for a dress. Rulia saw it and grabbed it for herself. I ran back to the store, but there was no plush left. Rulia didn't want me to wear better clothes than she before she got married. I found it unfair. It was my money and my work. She didn't work. She just went to school.

Once my mother told me to stay away from home because there was a man to come get acquainted with Rulia. I stayed away until I felt sleepy in the evening and went back home. I didn't know that he was still there. They were sitting at the table discussing Rulia's dowry. There was sugar, jam and tea on the table. My mother had always some sugar for visitors. That man saw me and liked me immediately. He left and we never saw him again. Later Rulia married my former admirer Joseph Shkolnik. We had terminated our relationships by that time. He was my date and Rulia didn't like him at all. She married him after I moved to Odessa. Yes, our relationships with my sister left much to be desired.

In 1928 collectivization(4) began in the village .A group of authorized officers came from the town to make the rounds of the houses in the village. I joined them and we went around to dispossess wealthy farmers. I believed that it was correct to make everything belong to everybody. Members

of these families were threatening to kill me. They believed that “zhydovka” was equivalent to a communist. My mother heard somebody saying that I became a boss and that it would be better to kill me and throw my body under the bridge. My mother got scared and asked me to write a letter to her brother Ershl “Ershl, please take care of my daughter. I am afraid that people would kill her.” My uncle told me to come and I went to Odessa in 1932.

My uncle Ershl wanted me to do the housework while I was staying with him. I didn’t have any intention to become his housemaid. I was a Komsomol and trade union member and had my ambitions. My other uncle Shyka helped me to get employment at the “Red “Cross” factory. I worked at the condom and dummy shop. I was a very dedicated employee and was transferred to the soap pan shop. At the end of the year I became a painter working at the same plant. I participated actively in all public events at the factory. On 1 May my responsibility was to hold a red flag on a platform on a truck. It was a very honorable duty. I didn’t observe any Jewish traditions and celebrated no holidays. I threw it off my life like vestige of the ignorant past and was inspired by communist ideas.

In 1932 famine(5). I was working and received bread coupons. My brother Joseph had finished lower secondary school and worked as a stableman in Chorniavka. It was easier to survive in towns while the situation in villages was very bad. My mother made skilly from dried leaves to save her children from starving to death. Our family survived. My mother sent my brother to me. I helped him to join the Jewish Komsomol organization of “Yermol” (Editors note: one of numerous educational institutions to educate poor and illiterate young people from villages) and entered a two-year school of mechanics. He studied and lived there. He got a bed in a hostel and a uniform. Students got one meal per day at the canteen and bread coupons. Joseph was growing and was constantly hungry. I gave him my bread coupons, because I was afraid that he could take to stealing if he starved. I had a piece of mamalyga (editor’s note: corn flour meal) from which I bit off small pieces to reduce the hunger.

My sister Surah became a nurse at the kindergarten in the collective farm. Then an officer from the Ministry of education heard about Surah’s problem and made arrangements for her to go to a hospital in Vinnitsa. My mother wrote me from the village to go see Surah in the hospital. She couldn’t go herself, because she didn’t have time. I went to see Surah. I found her in cast. She had had a surgery. Later she had a boot with steel parts and she wore it. Surah had no education. She was kind and had a pretty face.

My working day at the plant lasted 7 hours. When I came back to my uncle’s home I had to clean the apartment, do the laundry and wash floors. I didn’t have time to read. Besides, I was not used to reading. I had many friends and admirers. I was cheerful and pretty. I went out with my friends. I had Ukrainian and Russian friends, but I tried to stick to my Jewish friends. I took an active part in public activities. I was Komsomol assistant leader and was responsible for Komsomol meetings, we propagated communist ideas and worked harder and harder dreaming about wonderful future, awaiting for us, arranged labor competition and amateur concerts on Soviet holidays.

Later my cousin Adela, my uncle Shyka’s daughter, offered me to move in with her. She had two rooms. I met my first husband there. He was an electrician and came once to change fuse. His name was Wolf Ratiner. He was called Volodia that was a more customary Russian name. We got acquainted and began to see each other. Volodia was born in 1915. His father’s name was Ershl

and his mother's name was Sarah. Volodia's mother died in 1930 and his father married another woman, she was a housewife like my husband's deceased mother. Volodia's father was a warden at the synagogue in Odessa. Volodia was a younger son. He had two brothers: Haim and Fishel. His brothers were married and had children. His father moved to his new wife and Volodia had a room at his disposal. His parents were religious, they observed all traditions and celebrated holidays, but Volodia and I were atheists.

Volodia's family was against our marriage. When he told his family that he intended to marry me his father invited his children to a dinner and made an announcement that their brother wished to marry a country wench. He asked me whether I intended to work after wedding or I shall be a housewife. I told him that I intended to work. He told me that I was not of their kind: they were well educated and had good manners while I didn't and I didn't read as many books as they had and was a plain girl and that he wanted his son to marry an educated town girl. When the dinner was over I told Volodia that we had to stop seeing each other. But he replied that since his mother died his father never made him a dinner and his new wife never washed a shirt of his. He said he was going to live his own life and wanted me to become his wife.

Before we got married his father invited us for the first Seder at Pesach. He was a very religious man. When we came Volodia's father was sitting on pillows at the table. He said prayers and told me to open the door. I didn't know any Jewish traditions and I didn't go to open the door. Volodia's father explained to me that I was his younger daughter-in-law and that I had had to open the door and wait until he told me when to close it. He told me that the door should be opened for Elijah (6) to come in a sip some wine. Volodia's father began to ask me questions and I got all confused. I replied that I was a Komsomol member and was against religion. I left the house. Volodia ran after me and told me that I should obey his father and brothers. We left together. We visited his father very rarely because I had a feeling that I wasn't welcome in their house.

On the following day we went to the registry office. We got married in 1934. I was 20 and my husband was 19 years old. My husband's father invited us to dinner after the civil ceremony at the registry office. We didn't have any money left after Volodia paid the fee of 3 rubles for the ceremony. After we left the registry office I went to a nearby store to get some food for the small change that we had. There were radishes that we could afford. We came home and I made a salad with radishes and oil. We had a meal and then went to my husband's father. When we came his father had a dinner he wanted to treat us to, but my husband said "We are not hungry. My wife made a meal at home".

I was very happy to be living in the room of my own: to have a bed and a cupboard and be the mistress of my own home. I couldn't cook at all and I was learning from other tenants since we had a room in a communal apartment. My primus stove was on a windowsill in the hallway, as there was not enough space for it in the common kitchen. We worked hard, but we also had leisure time that we spent going dancing, celebrating Soviet holidays, getting together with friends. We had friends of different nationalities, but this was a matter of no significance for us. However difficult was our life we were happy. We had a hope for a better life, sang Soviet songs and went to the cinema. We didn't have children, though, for some reason.

My older sister Rulia and her husband moved to Odessa. Her husband worked at a plant and Rulia was looking after the children. They had two sons. Their older son Naum named after our father

was born in 1935. The younger Efim named after the deceased father of Rulia's husband was born in 1938. I loved my nephews dearly – they were so wonderful! My relationships with his sister improved and we became friends.

In 1940 my brother was recruited to the army. He liked it there and he sent us a photograph from the army. Joseph served in Brest Byelorussia and perished during defense of the Brest fortress on the first day of the war 22 June 1941.

On 1 May 1941 I became a member of the Communist Party. It had been my dream for a long time. I wanted to be in the first rows of builders of communism. It was quite a ceremony at the district committee of the Communist Party. The secretary of the district committee greeted me and shook my hand. However, it took them longer to issue my Party membership card and I didn't obtain it before the war.

I remember how we heard about beginning of the war at 11 am on Sunday, 22 June 1941. My husband and I were going to the market to buy me a sewing machine when all of a sudden we heard an announcement that Hitler attacked our country. We went out and there were crowds of people standing in lines to buy essential commodities.

My husband was summoned to the army. At the beginning of July he was already sent to the front. In August 1941 I received the only letter from him. I had no information about him whatsoever. I don't even know where his grave is. Much later an acquaintance of mine that was in the same regiment with Volodia told me that Volodia was killed near Kiev back in August 1941.

I kept working at the plant and evacuated on 18 September. There were announcements in the streets: "Enemy is at the gate to Odessa! The last ship is leaving. You have to leave, as Hitler exterminates Jews". I ran home, packed whatever little I could and rushed to the "Russia" boat. We boarded the ship, but its commandment announced that the ship was leaving during the night to avoid bombing. We left on this ship. When this ship was on the way back to Odessa fascists bombed it and it sank. I evacuated with Mirrah, the wife of Volodia's brother Haim and her mother. Mirrah was a pianist. She graduated from the Odessa conservatory.

The ship took us to Novorossiysk and from there we moved on by train. We didn't know where we were going. Our trip lasted 18 days. Once the train stopped at a small station and we went out to take a breath of fresh air. A woman came to us asking where we were going. We were dirty and hungry and the woman told us to come to their collective farm to stay there until the war was over. People thought that the war was not going to last long. So, we went to Abganerovo station near Stalingrad in 1300 km from Odessa.

Mirrah and her mother went to dig trenches. Mirrah had never seen a spade before. She grew up in Odessa and didn't know a thing about working with farm tools.

I worked at a military unit in Abganerovo. My profession was a painter, but I did everything I was told to do: I was appointed to a medical unit and had to take patients out for a walk, give enemas or take out patients' pots. In winter 1942 Germans occupied Stalingrad and we evacuated again. We stopped at Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, 700 km to the east. I went to work at a construction site, because they provided bread cards for 800 grams of bread per day. Mirrah and her mother had cards of dependants for 200 grams of bread per day. We were living in a plank barrack filling

chinks in the floor with moth. Life was very hard there. People were dying of cold and starvation. We didn't have any warm clothes. I received a winter jacket at the construction site and this was the only warm piece that we had. Mirrah and her mother learned to knit. Mirrah's husband Haim found us in 1944. He was wounded at the front and after he was released from hospital he was appointed director of Agadyr, a railroad station not far from Semipalatinsk. We all moved there. He employed me as a shipment forwarder on trains to Karaganda. It was a big city with the population of about 1 million people in over 3000 km from Kiev. I was so worried all this time that I was working there. My shipments were valuable and I was afraid of thefts on the way. Once there were barrels with alcohol in the shipment. At a station some people made holes at the bottom of railcars looking for this alcohol. It was a good thing they didn't find it. They would have filled their bucket and the rest of it would have been lost on the way. I was responsible for safety of shipments and I might have been punished for any losses.

I met Aron Shtempler, a Jewish man and my 2nd husband in Karaganda. He was born to a poor Jewish family with many children in 1917. He was born in the village of Radauty in Bukovina. It belonged to Rumania before 1940. In 1940 when the Soviet power was established in Bukovina he went to work at a mine in Karaganda. His parents perished during the war, but his brothers survived. When we got acquainted Aron spoke poor Russian. People in Radauty spoke Rumanian before 1940 and his family spoke Yiddish at home. We also spoke Yiddish with him at the beginning and then gradually his Russian improved. There were not many Jewish women there and he began to date me. Soon we got married. We had a civil ceremony. My husband lived in a hostel and I moved in with him. There were no comforts whatsoever in this hostel. There was one toilet and one gas stove for 50 families and we washed ourselves in a bowl in our room. My husband broke his arm at work and received a certificate of invalidity for one year. Our first son Victor was born in this hostel in 1945. We were homesick and decided to move to Chernovtsy, where my husband's older brother lived.

When we arrived at Chernovtsy my husband told me to wait for him at the railway station while he went to look for his brothers. Their neighbor told him that they had left for Rumania on the last train. They had sent invitation for us to join them there, but we didn't receive it. We didn't even have a place to stay overnight. My husband found an abandoned attic with no windows. There were bare walls and bugs there. It was cold and empty. My husband and I picked some wood and made a fire to warm it up a little. We had some savings that we spent to accommodate this attic for a living. In 1946 our 2nd son Efim was born. My husband's brother found us wishing that we moved to Rumania. It was necessary to refuse from the Soviet citizenship and I was reluctant to do this. Some neighbors told me that if I refused from the Soviet citizenship I might be put to prison. One could never be sure what might happen and my husband and I decided to stay in Chernovtsy.

My husband was a skilled tailor. He studied in Bucharest before the war. He made men's and women's clothes. The only problem was that tailors did not receive money regularly. Only when an order was ready their clients paid them. Sometimes we didn't have money at all. We leased a part of our dwelling to have additional income. When our children went to school I went to work at the button factory. I was working with the button press that I had to pull. There were corns on my palms – it was hard work. I earned 360 rubles per month. I had to make 16 thousand buttons per shift. It was a challenging job. If an employee managed to produce a planned quantity or more he might receive a bonus and have his photo on the Board of Honor. Some employees completed a

double quantity per shift. Sometimes I offered them some money in exchange for a number of buttons, if I felt that I wasn't going to handle a required standard. I just didn't want to produce fewer buttons per shift.

When we moved to Chernovtsy I found out what happened to my family. My mother and sisters Donia, Surkah and Fania stayed in Chorniavka during the war. Somebody told Germans that my mother's son was in the Soviet army. The local population sometimes cooperated with fascists. Germans threatened to kill those that were trying to help Jews and their families and people were scared and often reported to Germans. The Germans took all Jews to Pliskov where they shot them in the woods. My mother and three sisters perished there. Surka was the prettiest of all sisters and Germans raped her before killing.

In 1947 I went to Odessa to find out what happened to Rulia. Rulia's neighbor told me that Rulia was shot by Germans near her house. Rulia's sons were in the park at that time and her neighbor, a teacher, took the boys to her home when she saw that Germans captured Rulia. They lived with her for a month before somebody reported on them. Fascists took Naum and Efim and the teacher to the yard. They asked the woman why she had given shelter to the Jewish children. She replied that she didn't know that they were Jews. Their commanding officer told the children to take off their clothes. Of course, they both were circumcised. The Germans made a fire in the yard and threw the boys into the fire. The teacher began to scream and they shot her. Rulia's husband Joseph perished at the front. I was the only survivor of 6 children of my parents.

Stalin died in 1953. Many people mourned for him. I didn't cry and didn't grieve. I cried over all my tears for my family. Besides, I understood that Stalin had brought no good to his people. I knew he would be replaced by someone else. They say where there is a neck there would be a yoke.

My husband came from a religious family and was religious. After we moved to Chernovtsy we began to attend the synagogue. At the beginning I went there to please my husband but gradually I remembered what my mother had taught me. We only attended it on big holidays, we always knew the dates of Jewish holidays; there were calendars at the synagogue and our acquaintances had calendars. We didn't celebrate any holidays at home. We didn't have enough money to celebrate. Before I went to work we lived from hand to mouth and I took count of every kopek that we had. Later when I began to work in 1952 we began to celebrate holidays. We celebrated Pesach and I cooked gefilte fish and chicken. We had matzah and I made puddings. I mean, we had traditional food, but we didn't pray or conduct other rituals. I can't say that I had any urge to observe traditions. I was raised during the Soviet period and celebrating Jewish holidays I only gave tribute to the memory of my parents. However, my children have always identified themselves as Jews. They know Yiddish. They were not circumcised.

My husband and I liked guests and parties. We celebrated Jewish and Soviet holidays. We took advantage of every opportunity to have guests and party. We had fun singing and dancing when getting together with friends. I didn't take any part in public activities after I got married and didn't take any effort to restore my membership in the party. I didn't obtain my party membership identity card and was not registered as a communist. So there was no registration information about me in Chernovtsy. I took no interest in politics, either. I was a married woman and had other things to care about.

Our sons were doing well at school. In 1963 Victor finished a Russian secondary school. It was

difficult for a Jew to enter a higher educational institution. All our friends' children were leaving for other towns. Victor went to Tomsk in Russia and entered the faculty of Physics and Mathematic at the University. Upon graduation he returned to Chernovtsy and became a teacher of mathematics at school. Victor married a colleague of his. His wife Ludmila, nee Gotman, is a Jew. Victor has two children. His older son Jacob was born in 1972 and his daughter Yana was born in 1976. They both went to Study in Israel under the student exchange program "Sokhnut". They stayed in Israel after school. Yana visited Chernovtsy in 1997 for a month. She married a Jewish man and they left for Israel together. My son Victor got in a car accident in 1983. The doctors said that he had a concussion and sent him home to complete treatment. In two days' time he fainted and was taken to hospital. He died there during a surgery. We buried Victor at the cemetery in Chernovtsy. The Jewish cemetery was closed. We engraved the names of Victor, my mother and my husband's mother that had perished in the ghetto on my son's gravestone. We supported our daughter-in-law after our son died. We had supported them before as well: we bought a piano for our granddaughter and helped our son to buy an apartment. My husband worked 16 years after he retired and I worked 6 years more. My older daughter-in-law is like a daughter to me. She calls me Mother.

After finishing school Efim got fond of orienteering. He was very successful and was a permanent member of the sport team of the USSR. Efim married a Russian woman. My husband and I and her parents were against their marriage. Her father threatened to kill my son with an ax and said that they didn't want a Jew in their family. Well, the young people didn't listen to what they were told. They got married. Her father didn't come to their wedding. Only her mother came. They lived in their own apartment. I heard the word "zhydovka" for the first time after the war. It was said by my daughter-in-law, we had had an argument with her – I don't remember for what reason. I do not try to say that there was no anti-Semitism. I guess, it always existed, but almost all of my colleagues were Jews and so were my neighbors. Not all Russian people are bad, but many of them hate Jews. My older daughter-in-law told me that Efim's wife loves him and tolerates his relatives, but she hates other Jews. Efim entered the Institute of Physical Culture in Lvov after he turned 40 to get a diploma of higher education. He graduated from the Institute and became an international referee. He often goes on tours to the US and Israel. He has two children. His older daughter Anna married a Jewish young man and they moved to Israel. Now I have three grandchildren in Israel. Efim's younger son Vladimir studies at Business College in Chernovtsy. He visits me when he needs money. My son visits me when I ask him to do some shopping for me. But he doesn't ever listen to what I tell him. I tell him that I would like us to move to Israel and he should have a Jewish wife, that he should go to synagogue – well, things like this... He agrees with his wife in everything. I say to him "Son, you are on your wife's side, but who will be on my side?" He doesn't reply. It hurts, but what can one do?

My husband was eager to move to Israel. All his relatives live there. His brothers and sisters moved to Israel in late 1940s. As for me, I couldn't bear to leave my son and this wife of his here. I told my husband that I would go if my son, Efim would move to Israel. And we stayed. How I wished to visit Israel, but we couldn't afford it. Now I am too old. My heart goes out for this country. So many people die and these explosions... In 1995 my husband died. I buried him beside my son. I didn't follow any Jewish rituals. I don't know these rituals, I don't know the details of traditions and procedures to follow. I don't know any prayers, all I know is how to cook traditional food.

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991 the Jewish life changed. There are Jewish organizations and there are signs in town in Yiddish and Ukrainian. Jews feel protected. We receive food packages and money for medications. Old people receive small pensions and their savings vanished in Soviet banks. My husband and I worked so hard to save some money for our old age days, but I can't get any of it now. Now we can receive a new form of passport where nationality is not specified. I am against it. I have obtained a new passport. So what? Who would know whether I am a Jew, Ukrainian or gypsy looking at my passport? I have kept my old passport. I reported to the authorities that I had lost it and paid a fine. As for anti-Semitism, it won't vanish. I have a neighbor downstairs that told me that I had to go to Israel where I belong. I said to him "No, I live here and I belong here". Then another distant neighbor came to borrow some money from me. I said to her "Look, I am not a banker!" and she said "a zhyd must have money!" And I gave her some money. What else could I do. What if she gets angry and comes to break my windows or do other harm?

Volunteers from Hesed bring me newspapers and tapes with Jewish music. I got a tape-recorder from Hesed to listen to tapes. I can't read. I am blind in one eye and I have a hearing and walking problems. I am 87, old age... But I can still manage without a nurse or other assistance. I am used to doing things by myself. I even whitewashed this kitchen. Once, before I retired my husband insisted on hiring someone to clean the windows, but I had to redo this work after the woman had left. It is in my character to do things in my own way. I have good neighbors that bring me milk, meat and cottage cheese. I can manage with my pension. I also have tenants. I charge little from them, but that's sufficient for me. I still feel like the mother of the family. I make sauerkraut for my daughters-in-law and I like it myself. I also like to make soup with sauerkraut in winter. I also grow potatoes in my small kitchen garden in the backyard. I have raspberries and currants in my garden. I do everything in my garden. I work slowly and can do little work at a time, but I am in no hurry. I make jam for winter. I like work. While I can see with my one eye I will do things. If God Forbid I will lose sight I will ask for help. But not yet. I hope to live to celebrate my 100th birthday.

1. In 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.
2. Petliura Simon(1879-1926) , Ukrainian politician. Member Ukrainian social-democratic working party; In soviet-polish war has emerged on the side of Poland; in 1920 emigrated. Kill In Paris from the revenge for Jewish pogroms on the Ukraine.
3. White Guards counter-revolutionary gang led by general Denikin. They were famous for their brigandage and their anti-Semitic actions all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.
4. Forceful removal of grain and bread from the farmers in the early 1920s, the years of military communism.
5. In 1920 man-made famine was introduced in Ukraine causing death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress the protesting peasants that did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful forced famine in 1930-1934 in Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the farmers. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious farmers that did not want to accept the Soviet power and join the collective farms.
6. According to the Jewish legend the prophet Elijah visits every home on the first day of Pesach and drinks from the cup that has been poured for him. He is invisible but he can see everything in the house. The door is kept open for the prophet to come in and honor the holiday with his

presence.