

Mina Smolianskaya



I, Mina Smolianskaya, standing beside a press at work at Chernovtsy button factory in 1984. 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. There I worked before 1987.

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