

Tobiash Starozum

Tobiash Starozum

Kiev

Ukraine

Tobiash Starozum is a nice and friendly man. We met him in the Hesed office in Lvov. His wife Nadezhda and he invited us to their spacious and clean apartment. Tobiash and his wife have very warm caring relationships. They invited us to tea with delicious pie that was made on the occasion of our meeting.

The family of Starozum came from Lodz (Western Poland). Lodz is a big industrial town and center of textile industries. There was a number of plants and factories in Lodz: textile, weaving, woolen and carpet enterprises. They were well-equipped enterprises owned by Polish, Jewish and German businessmen. There were no trees or bushes in the town. Paved streets and brick houses formed a typical townscape. There was a big Poniatovskiy park outside the town. Young Jewish people from the surrounding smaller towns and villages came to Lodz to become workers and formed Jewish neighborhoods.

My grandfather on my father's side Toibe Starozum was born in a small town of Vydava near Lodz in 1863. All I know about my grandfather is what my family members told me. My grandfather was a tailor. He was sitting on the windowsill with his legs crossed sewing with a needle - he didn't have a sewing machine. My grandfather was religious like all other Jews in this town. My grandfather said a prayer on Fridays and went to synagogue on Saturday. They spoke Yiddish in their family and followed the kashrut. Jews in Vydava only ate kosher food that they must have bought in Jewish stores. My grandfather died in 1910. I don't know why he died. By that time all his 6 children lived in Lodz.

I remember my grandmother Laya Starozum very well. She was born in Vydava in 1865. She was a good housewife and a devoted mother. My grandmother lived with us. She had a room of her own and I remember her sitting on a chair in her long black gown and a shawl on her head looking through the window. On Friday grandmother lit candles in our houses. She was a fat woman and suffered from diabetes. My grandmother didn't go out. My mother looked after my grandmother and honored her much. On Friday my mother heated a big bowl of water, took it to my grandmother's room and washed her. My grandmother seemed very old to me, although she was only 55-60 years old then. She was very nice to me and always wanted to tell me things, but I was just a boy and took no interest in her stories. I felt like playing with other boys in the yard and left my grandmother to do my own things. I wish I had listened more to what she wanted to tell me. My grandmother died in 1925 when I was 10.

All children of Toibe and Laya Starozum were very close and supported each other at hard times and shared their joys. All boys studied at cheder, but after the children left their parents' home they stopped being religious, although they always identified themselves as Jews and observed traditions. Their mother tongue was Yiddish.

The older son Rivn Starozum, born in 1883, was a textile worker in Lodz, but later he changed his profession to become a butcher. He had a son and a daughter that perished during the Great patriotic war. The second son Khuna Starozum, born in 1885, was also a textile worker. He had a son Zavl Starozum. His whole family perished during the Great patriotic war. The third son Srul Starozum, born in 1887, had no children. He perished during the occupation. I don't know whether my father's brothers and their families perished in gas chambers of Auschwitz or in other camps. I know for sure that they were exterminated by fascists like almost all other Polish Jews. The fourth child in the family was my father's sister Surah, born in 1889. She met a Jewish man from Russia and married him when she was very young. During the Soviet power her husband became an EC officer (. Editor's note: EC - Emergency Commission - punitive authority of the Soviet power). Her husband perished in Stalin's prison in 1937, like many other people. Surah died in Kiev in 1965. My father's younger sister Toba moved to France in 1930s where she perished during occupation. I know that she had a son, but I don't know what happened to him during the war.

My father Aron Starozum was born in Vydava in 1891. He studied at cheder and was helping his father with sewing. My father followed his brother to Lodz in 1910s. He became an apprentice of a Jewish tailor and some time later obtained a permit for work. He was the only one of all children that took his father's profession. He owned a tailor's shop in Lodz. He was a good tailor that made overcoats, raincoats and suits for men. He had rich clientele. My father had a Zinger sewing machine. My father met my mother in Lodz. They met a proletariat club. Such clubs were a popular pastime at the beginning of XX century. Young people that were fond of communist ideas got together in these clubs to discuss communist ideas and sing revolutionary songs.

My mother Tsyrl, nee Klain, was a weaver at the Poznanskiy garment factory. She was born in the town of Grabovo near Lodz in 1889. My mother was 2 years older than my father.

My grandfather on my mother's side Mendel Klain was born in 1862. He owned an inn in Grabovo. The majority of population in Grabovo was Polish, but there were also Jews: shoemakers, tailors, clock repairmen, glasscutters and bakers. There were sausage stores owned by Jews. I remember kosher goose sausage. My grandfather had a big house with bitumen felt roof and verandah. On the first floor there was a their store where they were selling candy, cookies, herring, all essential goods. They also made and sold ice cream. It was the most delicious ice cream I ever tried. Theirs was the best ice cream.

My grandfather was very religious. He prayed twice a day with his tahles and tefillin on. He didn't work in his store on Saturday. He went to shil (Editor's note: that was how they called their synagogue) to "duvener" (Editor's note: pray in Yiddish). My grandfather wore light hats in summer and dark ones in winter. My grandfather only spoke Yiddish. Dinner for Saturday was cooked on Friday. At home they put meat, potatoes and spices into a bowl and took it to the baker's where they put the bowl into a stove to take it out of there on Saturday afternoon. This dish was called chulnt. There were only religious books in Hebrew at their home. They were stored on a special shelf and every time my grandfather wanted to take them he washed his hands thoroughly. He studied Talmud at home until late.

My grandmother Perl Klain - I don't know her nee name - was born in 1865. I remember her when she was a gray-haired and tiny woman. She always wore a long skirt, a shawl on her head and a snow-white apron. There was always ideal order at home and in the store. My grandmother was

selling things in the store and my grandfather watched the process sitting at a desk. My grandmother spoke Yiddish, but with her Polish customers she spoke Polish. I know that my grandmother didn't have any education and couldn't write, but she handled her customers well. She was religious and observed everything our God required from us. On Friday evening she lit candles. Dinner for Saturday was cooked a day before. My grandmother made fish and baked halas herself. They were delicious. My grandmother listened with respect to my grandfather saying a prayer. My grandmother also tended to customers on Saturday, because the law is not so strict to women and she could work, if necessary. My grandparents were not rich, but very respectable people in the town. They raised 5 children and were very proud of them.

My grandparents were old people when Germans occupied Poland in 1939. They shared the fate of all Jews in their town. They perished, but I don't know any details.

My grandparents' older son Laibl Klain, born in 1885, finished cheder in Grabovo and worked as a textile worker in Lodz afterward. He perished during occupation. His son Shlome, born in 1917, was a composer. He managed to escape to the Soviet Union. I know that he reached Kovel and got together with my aunt Esther. We met with him in Moscow. He was a very cheerful and talented man. Shlome was in evacuation in Siberia during the war. He worked at a club and had very little food. In 1946 he moved to Palestine. He died in Israel in 1970s.

My mother's older sister Esther (born in 1887) married a very nice and talented Jewish man - Jacob Ekhlis, in 1911. Poland was a part of Russia at that time and he was recruited to the Russian army. After WWI he stayed in Moscow and Esther joined him in 1922. Her husband Jacob, a very intelligent man, got a higher education and became chief engineer at a knitwear factory. In 1941 he volunteered at the Territorial Army. He perished during defense of Moscow. Esther evacuated to Ufa during the war. She lived in Moscow after the war. Esther died in 1972. They had a son - Efroim. He was at the front during the war. After the war he graduated from University and lectured on philosophy at the Medical University. He also deceased. Esther and her husband supported and helped our family and I remember them with love and gratitude.

My mother's sister Enta, born in 1891 lived in Lodz. She was a good dressmaker. She and her daughter Ella managed to escape to the Soviet Union in 1939. Her husband stayed in Lodz and perished. Aunt Enta was in Middle Asia in evacuation. In 1946 she emigrated to Israel where she died in 1967.

My mother's brother Pinakhes Klain, born in 1895, was a minor tradesman in Lodz. He perished in occupation.

All boys in the Klain family studied at cheder in Grabovo and went to synagogue with their father. In Lodz they stopped going to synagogue and stopped being religious people. This was a trend of the their time. However, they observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. Their mother tongue was Yiddish, but they also knew Polish and Russian.

My mother Tsyrl Starozum, nee Klain, born in 1899, was a second child in the family. She learned housekeeping and cooking habits from her mother and was very good at what she did. In 1906 my mother went to Lodz and got a job at the weaving factory. She learned weaving and worked at the factory for 7 years. My mother spoke Yiddish. She could also understand Polish. My mother met Aron that was a young tailor and my future parents got married at the beginning of 1914. They had

a traditional Jewish wedding. There was a huppah, the bride and bridegroom wore fancy outfits, and their wedding was officially announced by a rabbi. My father rented a good apartment where they lived and my father had his shop there. Since my mother got married she quit her job. She was a housewife. She did everything about the house and took care of the children. My father made clothes for my mother and she liked to dress up. They went out together.

I was my parents' first baby. I was born on 9 July 1915. We rented a 3-room apartment on the third floor of a 3-storied building. Our landlord was a Jewish man. We had two big rooms and a kitchen. One room served as my father's shop and another room was a bedroom. My mother did her cooking on a brick stove stoked with coal. My grandmother Laya lived in the third room that was very small. When my grandmother died nobody else lived in this room.

There was a market not far from our house. I enjoyed going to the market with mother. We went there once a week. There were Jewish and Polish vendors at the market. Clients spoke Polish to Polish vendors and Yiddish to Jewish sellers. We bought kosher meat from Jewish sellers. We, children, spent most of our time in the yard with not a single tree or bush. When the weather was bad we got together at the stairway. We didn't have any toys and played with whatever we found at home or in the yard. I remember how we valued fragments of stained glass, pieces of metal and little stones. Sometimes we played with walnuts.

Our neighbors were textile workers. When breadwinners of a family lost their jobs or fell ill their families moved out. The rent in our apartment building was high due to the running water that we had. All our neighbors were Jews and we only spoke Yiddish. We hardly ever played with Polish boys in the street. They didn't harm us, but we felt that they were from a different world. Our family was better off than our neighbors. My father had a permanent source of income and my mother was a perfect housekeeper.

We celebrated Jewish holidays. My mother always made a fancy dinner and we cleaned up our home for a holiday. We didn't go to the synagogue and nobody said a prayer in our family. My parents didn't work during holidays. At Pesach we celebrated 2 days, worked 4 days and the following 2 days were days off: "chalema" (Editor's note: hol hamoed - means half holiday, the intervening days at Channuka and on Pessach). All I remember about holidays is that I knew about them when there was a general cleanup of the apartment and my mother bought and cooked special and festive food.

There was a cheder on the same floor as our apartment. I have been there, but I didn't attend it. My father said that I "didn't need any of this nonsense". I felt sorry for these boys with payots and thick books that spent their days reciting something melodiously. After they left we came to this room through an open door and played under the benches. There were only benches and tables in this room. At Yom Kippur people used to pray in this room and we left our home to not interfere with those people and went to our relatives to my father's or mother's sisters or brothers to enjoy the holidays. They didn't pray or fast and didn't go to synagogue.

My father was interested in policy. In the morning after breakfast he used to say "Go and buy Folkstsaitung - People's newspaper" in Yiddish. I ran out to buy a newspaper and my father read it. My father was a just man. He didn't belong to any party. He believed in justice and not in parties. There was a Communist party and a Bundespalotionist Party - a Jewish national workers'

organization (Editor's note: this organization struggled for the formation of Jewish autonomous organization in Poland).

In 1922 my sister Shyfra was born. She was a favorite of all of us.

I went to school in a year's time - in 1923. It was a non-religious Jewish school, organized by the Bund Party for children of workers. My parents paid a small fee for my studies. We studied mathematic, Yiddish, Jewish and world history and geography. We studied in Yiddish. Boys and girls studied together in our school. Our teacher was a kind middle-aged woman. She was a Jew, of course. We had to come to school clean and tidy. Every day we had our ears, hands and nails checked for cleanness. Children, especially Jewish children, were more obedient at that time. There were about 30 of us in the class. We observed Jewish traditions at school, but they were explained as part of the history of Jewish people.

On summer vacation I went to my grandmother Perl in Grabovo. There was more space to play there and I had good friends to play with. My friends were only Jewish children in Grabovo. My schoolmates were children of workers that knew that they were going to become workers after finishing school. My classmates were children of our neighbors. I remember Moshe, a shoemaker's son, that became a shoemaker himself and Pinia, a textile worker. We finished school in 1931, but continued to be friends. I finished a lower secondary school, 7 years, when I was 16. My sister Shyfra went to school in 1931. She was 7 younger than I, and my parents understood by the time she went to school that she had to mix up with the rest of the world. Shyfra was sent to a state school for Jewish children. The language of teaching at that school was Polish. Her friends were also Jewish children from workers' families. At that time the wages received by workers were sufficient to provide for their families. Workers' wives were usually housewives.

After finishing school I began to assist my father. I worked with him until the war. I got up at 8 in the morning and sat beside my father to learn his profession. My mother's task was to sweep floors at our work area. Our working day lasted from 8 in the morning till 8 in the evening with half an hour for lunch. At 8 pm I could go to play with my friends in the yard. In my teens I began to meet with Jewish girls. I liked to read. There were many books published in Yiddish at that time. I liked historical novels and adventure books. Later I studied Polish and began to read in Polish. There were Jewish theaters in all Polish towns. We often went to the theater. My mother and father also liked theater. On Saturday we went to visit relatives. We got along well with our relatives. All women in the family were good at cooking, but my mother was the best. Even my memories are mouth watering. How delicious was her Gefilte fish! My father and mother didn't go Mikve or synagogue. On Sunday we went to sauna. There were Polish and Jewish visitors to the sauna, but there were no conflicts. I went to the sauna with my father and my sister and mother went together, too.

We read newspapers and had discussions with my friends and parents about the situation in Germany, but such is human nature that one never believes that something bad may happen to him. A war seemed to be far away from us.

In September 1939 Germans came to Poland. I was in hospital at that time. One had to pay for getting treatment in this hospital. If one was poor he had to obtain a confirmation from special commission. I had inflammation of joints. There were about 20 patients in my ward. We were

provided meals and medical treatment. I returned home from hospital and on the 2nd day at home I looked out of the window and saw German soldiers on horses.

Germans occupied Lodz without a single shot. Germans didn't take any actions during the first few days and then they started capturing Jews. I don't know how they knew Jews from non-Jews. Perhaps, they looked at their appearance. Polish people are different: fair haired and fair-eyed. Besides, Germans probably got the lists of Jews from the town authorities. I was captured in the street and out? on a truck. There were about 10 other people there already. There was only one thought pestering me during our drive and that was to escape. I jumped off where my second cousin Elia Haim lived.

He and I decided that it was time to save our lives. I didn't go home. On the 3rd day we set on our journey to the East. There were 4 of us. We walked at night. I didn't feel any pain in my legs or joints any more. The eastern part of Poland was occupied by the Soviet army, but everything was such a mess that one could cross the border to and for some time. We reached Belostok, a big town of textile workers that belonged to the Soviet Union. There were crowds of Jewish refugees in Belostok. Many of them slept in the streets. One day I met an acquaintance from Lodz. He told me that he had seen my sister. She was 17 then. I found her and said 'How could you leave our mother and father?' It became my goal to go back home and rescue our parents. There was a local train from Belostok to the border that was in about 20 km from the town. There was a Polish man going back home and we decided to go together. We reached the border, but the situation changed and the local train was to turn back without stopping to let people get off. The Polish man and I decided to jump off the train. I had to go to the railway station to take a train to Warsaw. On my way there I was captured by 3 Germans. I said to a German soldier: "Where are you taking me? I am Polish". He looked at me and let me go. I took a night train home. I sat there hiding my face so that nobody could guess that I was a Jew. I arrived at Lodz at night. At dawn I reached home and knocked on the door. Nobody answered. I shouted "Mother! Father!" They opened the door and asked me why I came back. I explained to them that we had to leave immediately. I was all white from lice. I washed myself and we set on our way to escape. We didn't take any luggage but a pillow for my mother - she was used to have her comforts and we wanted to make it comfortable for her. We got to Belostok and then managed to cross the border. I rescued my parents, but or remaining relatives all perished. My uncles were hoping that this nightmare was to be over soon, but it wasn't. In February 1940 Germans got all Jews to the ghetto in Lodz, the first ghetto in Poland.

We stayed in Belostok for about a month in terrible conditions. We slept in the streets or entrances of the houses. We spent few nights at a cultural center of a factory. We sent a telegram to Esther in Moscow to let her know that we were in the Soviet Union, but they couldn't do anything to help us. It was getting colder and colder - it was the month of November. Some Jews wished to return to Poland and were sent to Siberia by Soviet authorities.

Our family got to Cheliabinsk, in 3000 km to the northeast from Poland in December 1940 where we were given a room. My mother, my father, my sister and I worked on housing construction sites. I was a plaster worker, my father made lath and my sister painted the walls. My mother stayed at home. The temperature dropped to minus 40 at the beginning of winter in this area. We worked five days a week and at weekends we made clothes for our new customers. They paid us money for our work, so things weren't too bad for us. We learned to understand Russian in no time and

nobody paid any attention to our Jewish and Polish accent. There was no anti-Semitism at that time. There were Jewish construction managers we worked. When we told people about how Germans treated Jews, they sympathized with us, but I don't think they believed it could be true. Soviet newspapers wrote about friendship between Germany and the Soviet Union and people believed what was published in mass media. We were newcomers from the West and did not quite belong to those that grew up in the Soviet country. We were issued temporary passports that did not allow us to reside in big cities, but we were grateful to have been accepted and given a job. There was a tractor plant. There were many German communists among engineers at this plant. In 1941 these Germans were charged of espionage and imprisoned.

Esther wanted us to move to Moscow. In her letters she discussed options with us. In one of her letters she suggested that I married a woman from Moscow and that she had found one for me. At the beginning of 1941 - I believe it was February, our family went to Moscow. We stayed with Esther. They had a spacious 3-room apartment and we lived with them illegally for 3 months. We admired Moscow.

I got acquainted with a nice Jewish girl Maria Gofman, born in 1922. She had just finished the Library College. We got married soon. We had a civil wedding ceremony. Maria's parents liked me. Only marrying a girl from Moscow didn't give me the right to reside in Moscow. Maria's parents wanted to help me. Their son was an engineer at a construction agency. They were hiring workers from all over the country. I could go to any town where Maria's brother could hire me as a worker for Moscow. But the war interfered with our plans. It was not a good idea to have with illegal status in Moscow. In May 1941 my father, my sister and my mother went to Vladimir, the nearest town to Moscow. They rented a room there and my father and sister went to work at a shop. I stayed in Moscow until my coat was stolen and I turned to militia. They checked my documents and I had to sign the paper that I would leave the city within 24 hours. I went to Vladimir.

On 22 June 1941 the war began. It wasn't a surprise to us, we had already lived through one beginning of the war. Maria's father came to Vladimir to let me know that Maria was in Kazan where her brother got a job. Maria's father needed to move his belongings to Kazan from Moscow. I helped him move, but then it turned out that they didn't need me in Kazan. I didn't have a right to reside in Kazan, but I was hoping that my family life would help me to acquire a legal status. However, I had to make some arrangements, because at that time anybody with problems with his documents could arise suspicion and be charged of espionage.

I met an old Jewish tailor at the market incidentally. He gave me accommodation with him and I helped him with his work. Maria was visiting me, but it was clear that our family life wasn't going to improve. She was young and depended on her parents much. I didn't know anything about my family. I had a letter from them where they wrote that they and other refugees from Poland were to be deported - it was called "evacuation" in a civilized way - to Middle Asia. I knew I had to follow my family. I said "good bye" to Maria and it turned out to be our farewell. In 1942 Maria got cancer. Her parents moved her to Moscow for medical treatment. She died of cancer in 1944. She was buried at the Jewish corner of a cemetery in Moscow. I went to her grave when I was in Moscow.

I didn't have a permit for traveling across the country. I went to the railway station where I met an invalid wounded at the front that was going to Tashkent. I went with him. From Tashkent we went to Samarkand in 4000 km from Moscow. In Samarkand I met an acquaintance, one of those that

escaped from Lodz with me. He told me that he knew where my family was. They were in a collective farm near Samarkand. They were living in a clay hut sleeping on clay floors. I took my parents and sister to Samarkand. There I fell ill with typhoid and went to hospital. My father and sister got a job at a garment shop. After I recovered we rented a room in the center of Samarkand where there were European style buildings built at the beginning of XX century.

There were many Jewish refugees in Samarkand. There was a synagogue in Samarkand, but their Jewish community was very different. They spoke Uzbek and made different shape of matzah. Jews from Poland and other regions also formed separate groups. But what was common was our attitude to holidays. I believe we are born with an urge to celebrate holidays according to all rules. My mother stayed at home and was a housewife. She didn't know Russian or Uzbek, but she communicated all right. At home we spoke Yiddish.

In Samarkand I got a job as stage worker at the Opera Theater. I met a Jewish man at the Theater. His name was Isaac Sirota. He was a political officer at the trade school. He helped me to get a job at the agricultural trade school. He recommended me to the director and this director gave me a probation task to make mattresses. I had this task completed in no time and got the position of logistics manager. I also received a room at this trade school. There were students from various regions at school. There were Jews from Minsk, Kiev and other towns among them. The students had meals at the canteen and it was my job to do quality inspection of food. My hungry period of time was over.

We tried to take good care of the children orphaned by the war and give them sufficient food and clothing. We made uniforms for them. There was no anti-Semitism.

I was well respected and valued and in 1944 I got a job offer to take a positions at work camps for children. I accepted this offer and worked at such institution as logistics manager until 1975. We read newspapers to be aware of the situation at the front. The Jewish theater from Kharkov was evacuated to Tashkent and I always attended it when I went to Tashkent on business.

I seldom saw my parents, as I was very busy at work. My father and sister continued working at the shop. Shyfra got married in Samarkand in 1944. Her husband Laibl Rozenblum was a nice Jewish man from Poland. He was a metalworker. His parents were very religious. But the young couple had a plain civil wedding ceremony. Nobody could afford a Jewish traditional wedding at this hard period. They rented a room near where our parents lived. In 1945 their son Benyum was born. Laibl's parents insisted on having the boy circumcised on the 8th day.

I always read newspapers following the news from the front. I used to read the "Tashkent Truth" newspaper and listened to the radio. I learned to read in Russian. 9 May 1945 was a big holiday. People came out into streets hugging each other, crying for their lost ones, but feeling happy that the war was over.

In summer 1945 there was a Decree issued allowing Polish citizens to go back to Poland. My family began to pack to go back to Poland. I couldn't go with them. My job had sensitive restrictions, as our institution was within the structure of the Ministry of Foreign affairs. My colleagues respected me. We decided that my family would leave without me and then - come what may. I helped my family to obtain all necessary documents and pack. But what happened was that somebody stole their documents at the railway station. They were forced to get off the train on the border and go

to Moscow. I had to put together another package of documentation for them and take it to Moscow. When employees of the Polish Embassy in Moscow got to know that my father was such a good tailor they wanted to convince him to take up a job at the Embassy. They even promised him an apartment in Moscow. My father refused. He looked forward to going back home in Lodz. They went home to Lodz. But after they arrived, they didn't feel welcome in Poland. Nobody wanted them there. There were no apartments available and no jobs and no future. There was anti-Semitism similar to German anti-Semitism. There were very few Jews left in Poland. It was a rough situation and they didn't stay there long.

My parents moved to Germany from Poland. In Germany they received an allowance and moved all together. There was a very strict Jewish community in Chile (South America). At the end of 1946 my parents and sister moved to Palestine. Shyfra's husband stayed in Chile and I have no more information about him.

Members of my family worked at a kibbutz in Israel. They didn't get any payment for their work, but they got accommodation and meals at the kibbutz. They learned Hebrew there. My father did some farming and made clothes. My mother and sister worked at the canteen. When their situation improved they rented an apartment in Bat-Yam. My sister still lives in this apartment. She lived with our parents. She and our father had some knitwear business. Our mother died in 1964 and our father died in 1973. Benyum grew up and served in the army and then became a worker. He is married. My sister Shyfra is 80. She is a pensioner and is involved in public activities.

I felt very lonely after my family left the country and put all my effort into work. I understood that children in work camps needed help and care. Our management was very efficient and involved inmates of the camp into manufacture of roll-bearings, aluminum ladders and other things that were in demand.

In 1952 director of the camp where I was working was transferred to the town of Zhygulyovsk on the Volga (at present it is the town of Toliatti) to become director of a new work camp. He offered me to go with him and I agreed. I became logistics manager at that camp, too. Never I heard any curse words addressed to me. People didn't even tease me for my accent. I have always been nice to people. I never refused to help them.

Stalin died in March 1953. I always respected him deeply and was grateful to him. It was his order to allow us to come to this country when other countries were not so willing to let us in. We had a job, however hard work it was, and food. I didn't feel lost when he died. I understood that life would go on.

I got married in Zhygulyovsk in 1955. Her name was Natalia Markevich, a Jewish woman from Ukraine. She was born in 1922. I was 40 and my wife was 33. When we met she was the only survivor in her family – all others perished during Holocaust. Natalia worked as a nurse assistant in hospital. She was wounded but returned to her duties after she recovered. After the war she worked as an accountant at first and then she went to work in commerce. When it was impossible to buy anything in stores because they were empty, she could get goods that they received in their store to exchange them for different ones with her acquaintances working in other stores. We lived 30 years together. My wife was a very good housewife. We had a very cozy and well-kept apartment. We spoke Yiddish at home. We tried to observe all Jewish traditions. Unfortunately, my

wife couldn't have children due to her wound at the front. There were not many Jews in Zhygulyosk and there was no synagogue. My father used to send me a Jewish calendar with Jewish holidays specified in it.

My father visited me in 1962. Then, in about two years' time, my sister came and then my father visited me another time in 1967 or 1968. The Soviet Union didn't have any diplomatic relationships with Israel at that time. My father or sister bought tours in Italy or France to visit our country as tourists from other countries. They came to Moscow and we met at aunt Esther's place. I've always been open about my nationality or my parents and sister living in Israel. My colleagues were aware of my father's arrival. My boss approved my request for a vacation and I went to Moscow to see my father.

When my father came for the first time my mother's sister Esther and I met him in Odessa. My father saw that I had a good job and my colleagues respected me, so he told me to stay where I was. They were living at the kibbutz then working hard and suffering from malaria and heat. I guess they thought that I had an all right life when theirs was too hard and didn't want me to go through new hardships. I spent my vacation with them when they arrived. Once some men approached me at the hotel in Kharkov. I understood who they were and said "Would you like me to follow you?" They said "O'K, let's go". They took me to the Department of Internal Affairs. They asked me "Who is this woman?" I said "She is my sister and my heart and I couldn't care less about your directions or orders". When I returned to Zhygulyovsk my boss indicated to me that he was aware of my adventures. He told these people that I was on vacation and saved me from accusation for communication with foreigners.

I retired in 1978 when I was 64. My wife and I decided to move to a bigger town like Kuibyshev, in the south of Russia, 3200 km to the East from Kiev (Samara at present). We couldn't sell our apartment according to Soviet laws. We could only arrange an exchange. In the process of evaluation of options we got an idea about Lvov. I went there and heard Polish spoken in the streets. I liked the town, its architecture and culture and we decided to move here. I was a pensioner and Natalia went to work at a store. People also spoke Yiddish and it was nice to talk Yiddish with someone.

My sister came for the last time in 1988 at my invitation. She didn't insist on our moving to Israel. On the other hand, it wasn't possible at that time. Natalia was severely ill and I had had an infarction. In 1989 my wife died of stomach cancer. I felt so lonely.

I had a neighbor. Her name was Nadezhda Sidorenko. She came from Chornobyl (Editor's note: after disaster at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant inhabitants of Chornobyl were evacuated to various regions in Ukraine). Nadezhda and her son's family moved to Lvov. She is Russian. She was born in 1927. She decided that she wanted to live the rest of her life with me. We have been together for 12 years. We get along well and have a good life.

I just told her then to leave her keys to the children and come to my apartment. She did so. She knows that Jews are reliable men and that I am.

In the recent years I noticed a change in the attitude towards the Jews. There is no anti-Semitism on the state level. The cultural life is becoming more active. Jewish theaters come on tours. Jewish folk groups come on tours and we can go to watch Jewish movies. As I have noticed that not only Jews attend these events. Besides, the Jewish Charity fund plays a big role in the development of the

national self-consciousness. I go there sometimes to read Jewish newspapers or to listen to lectures. I am a member of the Sholem Alechem Association in Khesed. We celebrate holidays there. Nadezhda enjoys going with me. I am very interested in Jewish life. I am so glad that our people are so united. I enjoy attending events at the Khesed and happy for the people getting together.

I would give anything in the world to go to Israel. All I want is going to the graves of my parents. But I never managed to go there for different reasons, work or health condition. However, I have no regrets.