

Fira Usatinskaya Biography

Fira Usatinskaya

Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: April 2003

Fira Usatinskaya lives in a nice one-storied apartment in a new district in Kiev. She has new furniture and a Japanese TV set in her apartment. One can tell that she is doing fine. She has many books on her bookshelves: modern editions of Russian and foreign classics and many detective novels. Her son Felix, who earns good money as a lawyer, supports her. Fira met me wearing a nice suit, trousers and jacket, and with her hair nicely done. She is very hospitable and friendly. She looks young for her age. She seems to be a strong self-possessed woman, who went through many hardships in her life.

My father, Froim Usatinskiy, came from a small town called Gaisin in Vinnitsa region [300 km west of Kiev]. Like many other towns in tsarist Russia it was located within the Pale of Settlement [1]. Jews constituted 98% of the town population. There was a synagogue, a cheder and several houses of prayer. There were beautiful big stone houses in the center of town. They were owned by wealthy local people: merchants, bread and wine traders, doctors and lawyers. In their majority, Jews were craftsmen or ran small trades and lived in small, decrepit houses with worn-out roofs. The houses were built close to each other and looked like they were supporting each other from falling apart. There were no flower gardens near the houses. Some families kept some poultry and bred them for a big holiday. Most of the local Jews bought their food products at the market. The market was open at weekends in the main square. Villagers from surrounding villages sold dairy and meat products and vegetables and bought essential goods like matches, soap, tools and fabric.

My father told me that my paternal grandfather, Yol Usatinskiy, was a tradesman. He had a small haberdashery store in his house. I know very little about him or my grandmother Feiga. They died during some epidemic. I only know that they were born in the 1860s and died long before the Revolution of 1917 [2]. My father told me that they were very religious. They observed all Jewish traditions, followed the kashrut, honored and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My grandfather went to the synagogue every day and my grandmother joined him on Saturdays. That's all I know about my grandfather's family. I knew only one of my father's brothers: his younger brother Yudko Usatinskiy. My father said that there were many children in the family, but almost all of them died in infancy.

Yudko, born in 1900, lived in Lugansk. He was a trader. I saw him several times. He had a wife called Tsylya and two children, a son called Leonid and a daughter called Betia. During the Great Patriotic War [3] they were in evacuation somewhere near the Urals, and after the war they returned to Lugansk. My uncle and his wife died around 1960. Leonid graduated from medical college and worked as a district physician for the rest of his life. He died in the middle of the 1990s. His sister Betia, an economist, lives with her son in Kharkov. We hardly communicate.

My father was born in Gaisin in 1890. He was the oldest son. It was traditional in Jewish families to give older children, boys in particular, good education. My father got his Jewish education at cheder like everybody else. Then he finished a grammar school. My father was an intelligent man and earned his living as a private teacher. He taught reading, writing and arithmetic to Jewish children preparing them for grammar school.

My father told me very little about his youth because my mother, Freida Pivchik, was his second wife and jealous about anything associated with the time when my father lived with his first wife. I know that his first wife's name was Beila and my father must have been very much in love with her. They had two children: Nuchim, born in 1917, and Maria, born in 1920. Maria was born at the height of the Civil War [4]. Once my father, Beila, Nuchim and little Maria were hiding in a cellar during a pogrom [5]. Beila caught a cold that resulted in galloping consumption (which was the name for tuberculosis at that time). She died at the beginning of 1922.

Nuchim changed his first name to the Russian name of Nikolay [common name] [6] in the 1930s. After finishing school he graduated from Donetsk Medical College. He had just passed his graduation exams when the Great Patriotic War began. All graduates were taken to the front. Nuchim worked in a field hospital during the war. He is a retired Colonel of Medical Service. He lives with his wife Polina in Moscow. Their daughter Galina and their granddaughter Inna and her husband and child live in Moscow, too.

Maria's life wasn't so successful. She finished medical school in Lugansk before the war and was recruited to the army from there. She worked as a medical nurse at the front throughout the war. She was married, but her marriage didn't last. She had no children. After the war she returned to Lugansk and worked as a medical nurse in a polyclinic. In the 1950s Maria moved to Kiev. We talked on the phone and visited one another. She was very lonely. She died in 1999.

Neither my sister nor brother were religious people. They gave up Jewish traditions when they were in their teens and left their parents' home. They never resumed observing Jewish traditions.

My father was having a hard time after his first wife died. He needed to earn his living and take care of the children at the same time. He met my mother in 1923. Their meeting was arranged by matchmakers.

I know very little about my mother's parents. They lived in Gaisin, Vinnitsa region. My mother's father, Srul Pivchik, was born in the 1860s and was either a shochet or a senior man at the synagogue in Gaisin. The family was poor. I only have one photograph of my grandmother Esther. She was younger than my grandfather. She was born in the 1870s and was a housewife. I also know that my grandfather and grandmother died long before my parents met in the 1910s.

My mother had two sisters and a brother. They got secondary education. They left their parents' home as soon as they grew up. They were all religious people and observed Jewish laws and traditions throughout their life. My mother's oldest sister, born in 1890, moved to Palestine with her husband. I don't know her name or the names of her three daughters, who were born in the Promised Land. I only remember her letters that we received before the Great Patriotic War and some time after, which smelled magnificently of exquisite perfume. There were beautiful people wearing fancy clothing in the pictures that she sent. They were my cousins and their husbands. I

felt envious, of course. In 1967, when the Soviet press began to indict Israel my mother tore all letters and photographs from there apart because she was afraid that our connection with Israel would be revealed. [The interviewee is referring to the dangers of keeping in touch with relatives abroad.] [7] I don't know what happened to my relatives there. Perhaps, I still have cousins and nephews in Israel. Only one photograph of my cousin, whose name I don't know, survived. It was taken in the middle of the 1920s and sent to us from Israel [then Palestine].

Sarra, my mother's second sister, and her brother Gedali lived in Bessarabia [8]. After Bessarabia joined the Soviet Union in 1939, my mother and I went to see them.

Gedali Pivchik, born in 1893, was a shochet in the town of Zguritsa [today Moldova]. He had a wife called Tsyliya, and they had a daughter called Esfir and two sons called Srul and Meyer. In my mother's family children were named after our grandfather and grandmother, thus Esfir or Esther and Srul. Before the Great Patriotic War Gedali's family was very religious. They strictly followed all rules and observed all traditions. During the Great Patriotic War Gedali and his family were in evacuation. After the war they settled down in Chernovtsy. We didn't see them after the war, and I don't know whether they remained religious. All I know is that Gedali didn't work and that the family was very poor. Gedali died in the middle of the 1960s. I know from my relatives that his daughter Esfir and her family moved to America in the 1980s. His son Srul lived in Moscow and Meyer, who was single and had no children, died in Chernovtsy in the middle of the 1990s.

Aunt Sarra Foltysanskaya, my mother's younger sister, was born in 1895. Her family lived in Beltsy, Moldova. Her husband was a craftsman and they had four sons and a daughter. I don't remember the name of her oldest son, but the others were called Srul, Izia, Natan and Esfir. They were in evacuation with the family of Uncle Gedali, and after the war they settled down in Chernovtsy. We never met them. Aunt Sarra died a long time ago. She died even before Uncle Gedali passed away. Her oldest son and Srul are dead now, too. Esfir and Natan and their families live in Chicago, USA, where they moved to in the late 1970s.

My mother was born in Gaisin in 1896. She finished a Jewish elementary school and then studied at the lower secondary school in Gaisin. She didn't finish it. I think she had to go to work to earn her living. I don't know what she did for a living. My mother could read and write in Yiddish and Russian very well. Regretfully, that's all I know about the life of my mother before she met my father. I know that her parents were very religious and that she was raised that way, too. She observed Jewish traditions, celebrated holidays and prayed. My mother must have been very poor and must have had a hard life if she agreed to marry a widower with two children. This means that she had no choice. Perhaps, she never talked about her youth for that reason.

My parents got married in Gaisin in 1923. They were both religious. They had a chuppah and were married by a rabbi. They didn't have a wedding party because it was my father's second marriage and his relatives, especially his brother Yudko, who lived in Lugansk were against it. It wasn't because of my mother that they didn't want this marriage to take place, but nevertheless my father stopped his relationship with his brother back then. He didn't want to stay in Gaisin, probably to avoid gossip. After they got married my parents moved to the small town of Ilinty, Litin district, near Gaisin.

I was born in Ilinty on 12th February 1924. I was named after my grandmother. My brother Srul, named after our grandfather, was born in 1926. My parents were very poor. They rented an apartment. I don't remember anything about Ilinty. My mother told me that it was a typical small town with the majority of the population being Jewish. There was a market and a synagogue in the center and all residents knew everything about each other's life. My father was a teacher, but in those hard years there were few people that wanted to get education and he didn't have many pupils. He took to any work – he was an assistant in a shop and an assistant joiner – but the family still didn't have enough food. My older brother and sister, Beila's children, thought that my mother was to blame for their poverty since she gave all food to her own children – my brother and I. Maria suffered from this jealousy most of all. She wrote letters complaining to Uncle Yudko in Lugansk and he took her to his family every summer. This didn't change the situation in our family. In fall Maria returned and was even more bitter and intolerant. However, all the other children in our family got along well, and we stayed friends for the rest of our life.

Our family was very religious. We strictly followed the kashrut and had special dishes for meat and dairy products. We only had meat on high holidays at the time, but we never mixed meat and dairy products. My parents celebrated Sabbath. On Fridays my mother and older sister cleaned the apartment thoroughly – there were two small rooms and a kitchen with a Russian stove [9] – and washed the wooden floors scrubbing them with sand. My mother made challah and a festive dinner: cottage cheese pudding, potato pancakes, stewed cabbage and sometimes chicken broth and chicken.

We only had gefilte fish on Pesach. My mother saved money for a whole year to celebrate Pesach. Matzah was bought at the synagogue in advance. A chicken and small turkey were slaughtered by the shochet. My mother used special kosher crockery and utensils stored in an old box – this was her only dowry. There was a dish with all the required food on the table on the holiday: eggs, potatoes and bitter greenery. My father conducted the seder wearing his tallit. He leaned back in his seat at the head of the table. This scene is imprinted in my memory. My father went to the synagogue every day wearing his tallit and tefillin. My mother joined him on Saturdays. My father always prayed at home before meals. On Yom Kippur my parents spent a whole day at the synagogue. They returned home late in the evening. We also had a festive dinner after the day's fasting.

My mother often prayed with a prayer book that had strange, unknown letters in it. She often cried while praying. I asked her, 'Mother, why are you crying?', and she replied, 'If you knew what is written in here you would cry, too'. I didn't get to know what was written in there. My parents didn't teach us Yiddish. They were always busy and had no time to spend with us. When I went to school and became a pioneer they tried to avoid any Jewish subjects in my presence. My parents spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian with us, children.

In 1931 my family moved to the south of Ukraine looking for a better life. We settled down in a former German colony [10] in Nagaevo, Odessa region. Besides Germans many Jews lived there. They worked in a Jewish kolkhoz [11]. My parents had no luck there either. We arrived in late fall after the harvest. There was no work for my father in the kolkhoz. After a month or two my father and older brother went to Makeevka in Donetsk region where my father's distant relative Benjamin Usatinskiy lived. He promised to help my father to get a job. My mother, Maria, Srul and I stayed in

Nagaevo. We lived in one room in a decrepit house that we had received when we arrived in Nagaevo. We didn't have any food and wood to heat the room. We stayed on the stove bed under feather blankets with chattering teeth. The other kolkhoz farmers didn't like us. They even believed my father and brother to be shtreykbrekhers [Yiddish for 'deserter', 'traitor'] because they left the kolkhoz. The chairman of the kolkhoz, an old Jew, sympathized with us and when it grew dark he or his daughter brought us some food. He allowed us to secretly take corn to stoke the stove. My mother and Maria made hats from straw and ropes. They got a dozen eggs, a jar of milk or a loaf of bread for their hats. At the end of summer 1932 my father came to take us to Makeevka, where he and my brother had found jobs.

Makeevka is a town of miners, about 30 kilometers from Donetsk. Its population was mixed like in many other towns in the south of Ukraine: Russian, Ukrainian and those that came from Northern Caucasus. There were many Jews in town, a big synagogue and a Jewish cemetery. We first rented an apartment in Makeevka, and in 1933 my parents bought their own apartment in the basement of an old two-storied house. There were three tiny rooms in a row and a kitchen with a Russian stove. In fall and spring our rooms were flooded after it rained. We were still very poor. My father went to work as a janitor at the bakery and that saved us during the famine in 1933 [the famine in Ukraine] [12]. My father brought us loaves of bread that had fallen apart. I don't know whether this bread really fell apart or if he helped out a little there, but in any case this bread saved us. We always looked forward to my father coming home from work and putting gray glutinous bread on the table. My mother gave equal pieces to my older brother and sister, Srul and me. My father didn't eat any bread at home, telling us that he had had enough at work. My mother ate a very small piece.

My brother Nuchim worked somewhere and Maria was a senior student at school. Around 1935 my brother went to Donetsk where he entered Donetsk Medical College, and Maria moved to my uncle in Lugansk for good. She finished school and entered a medical school there. My father still didn't get along with my uncle. He never visited him and his brother never came to see him either. We hardly ever saw him.

In Makeevka I went to a Russian secondary school. There were mostly Jewish families in the building where we lived. My brother Srul and I had many friends. I also had Ukrainian and Russian school friends since there were children of various nationalities in our school. Our teachers treated us nicely and there was no segregation at school. The children were different though. There was a group of pupils that called Jews 'zhydy' [kike]. Once they even caught my brother and me after classes and applied pork fat on our lips teasing us that we didn't eat pork. I can say that I have identified myself as a Jew since my childhood.

I became a Young Octobrist [13] and then a pioneer and Komsomol [14] member at school. I took an active part in all activities: sang in the choir and attended dance and drama clubs. I also played checkers and chess. I liked studying at school, even though I wasn't the best pupil. I was good at German and my teacher often asked me to help other children with the German language. We celebrated all Soviet holidays at school and attended parades on 1st May and 7th November, October Revolution Day [15]. On holidays my friends and I went for walks in the park and to the cinema or cultural center in the evening. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. My parents went to the synagogue and celebrated Jewish holidays. They understood that my brother and I had

other interests and didn't impose their outlooks on us. I regret that I didn't learn my mother tongue and Jewish traditions and customs, but when I was young I thought these to be a vestige of the past. I didn't care about nationality and just differentiated between good and evil people. I still do.

Craftsmen and workers lived in our house. Fortunately, none of us suffered from the arrests in 1937-38 [during the so-called Great Terror] [16]. However, I remember that some of my schoolmates' fathers were arrested. They were charged of sabotage and subversive activities at the mines where they worked. I remember a Komsomol meeting in 1939 when one of my schoolmates publicly repudiated his father. He would have been expelled from the Komsomol if he hadn't done it and that would have been a horrible punishment. Our teachers were decent people and the atmosphere in school didn't change. We believed everything our teachers told us and didn't even question the correctness of the state policy or any happenings in the country.

In 1940 my parents sold our apartment and bought a house. It was a modest house, but there was a kitchen garden and a garden close to it. There was electricity in the house, but there was no gas and we stoked the stove with coal. The toilet was in the yard, but this was so common in Makeevka that we didn't consider it a discomfort. There was also a radio in the house. We often listened to concerts and literary readings in the evening. Shortly before the war we got a record player and I was very fond of listening to records. I liked Soviet songs such as 'How spacious is my country', 'March of enthusiasts', etc. [Well-known Soviet patriotic and Communist songs.]

We heard about the beginning of the Great Patriotic War on the radio. There were crowds of people near street radios at noon of 22nd June 1941 listening to the frightening words by Molotov [17] about the beginning of the war. This was one day before I received my certificate for finishing my 9th year at school. After about ten days our relatives from Bessarabia arrived: my mother's brother and sister, their children and husbands, in-laws, neighbors and acquaintances. They arrived on horse-driven carts and there wasn't enough space in the yard for all of them to park. They were tired and exhausted and after having a meal they fell asleep on the floor. They were telling horrible details of the brutalities of Nazis and about their escape. Our relatives didn't stay long but soon continued their way to the East by train. Nuchim and Maria were recruited to the army on the first days of the war. Maria came to say goodbye, but my stepbrother didn't even get a chance to see us before he left.

My parents, my younger brother and I packed, ready to evacuate. My mother made rucksacks from pillowcases for us into which we put our underwear, clothes, a few textbooks and our favorite books. There were air raids and a curfew was introduced in the town. My father made a shelter in the yard where we were hiding during air raids. We only managed to leave in October 1941. Our distant relative, the one that once helped my father and brother to find a job in Makeevka, helped us to evacuate. He worked at a large metallurgical plant and we managed to evacuate to the Ural with this plant. We traveled in a freight train with a stove in our railcar. We had food to last two weeks, at the maximum. We didn't believe we would be gone for long. We didn't have many essential things. We didn't have cups or all the necessary clothes. At stations we sometimes got some cereal or soup. Our fellow travelers even managed to cook some food on the stove. It was good that we had enough dried bread. During air raids on our way the train stopped and we scattered around. For some reason I was scared most about seeing dead horses in the fields. I was very afraid from then on.

We traveled for a month. We left on 7th October and on 7th November 1941 we arrived in Sosedkovo, the village of the Nizhniy Tagil timber enterprise [the town of Nizhniy Tagil is located in the Ural, Russia, 2,500 kilometers from Kiev]. We were accommodated in a local house. The owners were good to us. They let us wash ourselves – it's hard to describe how dirty we were. They put our clothes in the stove to kill the lice. We stayed with this family a few days until we got a place in a room in a barrack. There were sheets and blankets that served as partials in this room. We were lucky to have a stove in our part of the room.

My father became a janitor at the fuel storage facility of the kolkhoz of the timber facility breeding horses and cattle. My younger brother Srul also got a job there. He was someone's assistant. My father and Srul walked about eight kilometers to work from the village. My mother and I stayed in our cold room. We stayed in bed and tried to warm each other up. We couldn't wait until my father came home. There was a canteen for workers at the kolkhoz, where my father got some leftover food for us: soup or cereal. This was our only food for the day. We got some potatoes in the village, but they froze because even the walls in our dwelling were covered with a layer of ice. We exchanged everything we had for food and wood. My mother displayed her dresses and blouses on our bed and the locals came and took them away for a bucket of potatoes, a jar of milk or a piece of butter. Sometimes people brought us potato peels and my mother made potato pancakes from them.

We were called 'zhydy'[kikes] by the locals. By the way, they weren't anti-Semites because they had never met Jews before. When we arrived the locals came to take a look at us and make sure that we didn't have horns or hooves. However, they treated us nicely and sympathized with us. There was no synagogue in the kolkhoz and there was no way to celebrate Jewish traditions. We ate what we could get and were happy to get any food at all. We had no idea of the dates of holidays. Only in the evening did my father pray quietly in a corner of the room.

Life became easier in spring. My mother and I went to work at the kolkhoz. We worked hard in the field or threshing-floor, but we got a hot lunch and in autumn we could eat vegetables in the fields. In spring 1943 we got two rooms and a kitchen with a stove in a wooden house and a plot of land, where we planted vegetables and potatoes. I became a secretary for the director of the kolkhoz. It happened that with my lower secondary education I was the most qualified applicant for this position. The director put a lot of trust in me: I was responsible for the recruitment of young people to the army and the preparation of lists. When working there I managed to obtain a permit that enabled my brother Srul to escape his army service. After work Srul fixed irons, kettles and the tools of kolkhoz workers. I embroidered fabric for blouses after work. We got food for our work.

In September 1943 I passed my exams for the 10th grade at school and entered the Faculty of Economics at the Mining College in Nizhniy Tagil. I chose this college because its students received a higher stipend and there was a hostel. There were eight girls in my room. They came from various towns and were of various nationalities. We shared all food that we brought from home and put together our stipends for buying food for all of us. We lived like in a commune. Our main food was fried potatoes, carrot tea and pies with cabbage filling that one of the girls made. We got along very well and enjoyed our life together. I went to see my mother on vacations and she fed me well.

Makeevka was liberated at the end of 1943 and we began to pack to go home. I couldn't get my documents – my examination record book and my certificate of secondary education – from the

college since they didn't want to let me go. I left with my parents and brother after finishing my 1st year without waiting for the permit for my departure or other documents.

Our house in Makeevka was half ruined. There was a hole in the ceiling and some walls had fallen down. There were no pieces of furniture and bed sheets left. Later, our neighbors returned some of our belongings. My friends also came back from evacuation. My older brother Nuchim was still in the army. Maria returned to our uncle in Lugansk. My brother and sister got to know our address through an evacuation agency. We corresponded throughout the war, but it took letters very long to reach us and sometimes they got lost. Our family was lucky to have survived the war.

I was a secretary at the town military registry office where I worked until summer when I went to Kiev to enter a college. I just wanted to study. I didn't know what kind of colleges there were in Kiev or what exactly I wanted to study. I didn't have any money or acquaintances in Kiev. I stayed with my mother's distant relatives. I hadn't known them before, but my mother wrote to them and they invited me to stay with them. I went to a few colleges, but they refused to accept my application since I didn't have my certificate of secondary education and my examination record book wasn't valid. I sent a request to Nizhniy Tagil and they sent me my documents. I was accepted for the 2nd year at the Faculty of Economics of the College of Light Industry. I also received a room in the hostel with five other girls.

I finished my studies in 1949. I had a nice group of friends in the hostel. We celebrated holidays and went to the cinema, museums and parks on the slopes of the Dnieper River together. We also went to theaters that had also returned from evacuation. We like going to parades on 1st May and 7th November. After the parades we went for a walk in the city. There were many Jewish students at college, but there were also students of various other nationalities in our group. I was involved in Komsomol activities and was a member of the Komsomol committee of the college. I took part in Komsomol meetings where we discussed issues associated with our studies and in amateur art activities. I organized contests and concerts. I met my future husband at the college. However international my views were I wished to marry a Jewish man, although I didn't observe any Jewish traditions at the time.

My husband Michael Aronovich was born to a worker's family in Kiev in 1921. His family didn't observe any Jewish traditions. His father Haskel Aronovich was a communist and sincerely believed in Lenin's ideas. His mother Charna - she called herself Tsyliya - was a housewife. Michael went to the army after finishing school in 1939, was at the front during the war and was awarded orders and medals. After the war he served in the occupying forces in Austria, Germany and Romania. He demobilized in 1947 and was admitted to the Faculty of Technology at my college. I liked Michael. He was a tall and strong man. He wore his military uniform and coat with the shoulder straps removed, like many other guys that returned from the front. About 1948, during the period of anti-Semitic campaigns and the struggle against cosmopolitans [18], my husband changed his name to Michael. He said that he wanted his children to have a common patronymic to have fewer problems in life. We had the same group of friends for a long time. Michael and me spent time together, but we never talked about a closer relationship. We didn't face any anti-Semitism. We only read about 'enemies of the people' in newspapers and we never doubted anything published officially by the mass media.

I graduated from college in 1949 and got a job assignment [19] to a leather plant in Nikolaev [regional town, about 400 km from Kiev]. I specialized in economical leather production. I spent my one-month vacation with my parents in Makeevka. My father worked in the commercial sector and my mother was a housewife. They observed Jewish traditions as before. There was no synagogue in Makeevka, so my father went to pray in the prayer house every now and then. I thought this all to be outdated and obsolete: religion, traditions and celebration of Saturdays.

In Nikolaev I got accommodation in the hostel located near the plant. I had a room for myself, only the toilet and kitchen in the corridor were for common use. There were hardly any other Jewish employees at the plant, but I got along well with my colleagues. At weekends my friends from the hostel and I went to the cinema or dance parties at the cultural center of the plant. I worked at the Department of Labor and Salary for a year. I had to learn many things since we had only studied theory in college and I needed to gain some practical skills. I had a good salary and for the first time in my life I could afford to buy clothes and shoes. I enjoyed it very much.

In summer 1950 I went to attend a traditional meeting of fellow students in Kiev. I met with Michael in Kiev and we realized that we were in love with each other. We spent several days going for walks and kissed in the parks, but then I had to go back to work. We corresponded for a year and in summer 1951 Michael came to see my parents in Makeevka to get their consent to our marriage. A month later we had a civil ceremony at the registry office in Makeevka. My mother made me a fancy dress of crepe de Chine, and Michael's parents bought him his first suit. We could only afford to buy one ring – for me. We didn't have money for a ring for Michael, and, besides, men didn't wear wedding rings since they were considered to be a vestige of the bourgeois past. We had a small wedding party. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. We just invited our close relatives and friends.

I had to go back to Nikolaev again, but this time I had the status of a married woman. In 1952 my husband wrote an official request to my company to dismiss me, so I could go to Kiev. My management was reluctant to let me go since I was valued as an employee and was the head of the Planning Department at that time. However, I resigned and went to Kiev. We lived with my husband's parents in a two-bedroom communal apartment [20] in the center of Kiev. My husband went to work as a production engineer at the Metal Ware Plant. He worked there his whole life. I faced direct anti-Semitism when I came to Kiev. I couldn't find work until an acquaintance of ours helped me to get a job at the Animal Raw Material Supply Company.

In January 1953 our daughter Sophia was born. I have bright memories of this time. I walked with my baby listening to street radios that broadcast information about Stalin's health condition every hour. When he died there was a feeling that life had stopped. I went back to work two months after my daughter was born. Sophia stayed with my mother-in-law. I was fired on the grounds of staff reduction. A few months later I was employed by the Central Statistics Department for one month. Every month I was worried about whether they would extend my employment agreement. In due time I was employed permanently and I worked there as an economist until 1970. In the same year I went to work at the Ministry of Local Industry where I was a leading labor and salary specialist. I worked there until my retirement.

My husband was a member of the Communist Party. He was a fanatic communist. He never took part in party activities. He believed that work performance was his only duty. My husband paid his

monthly fees and attended meetings where he listened attentively to what was said. That was his faith and his God. He wasn't a party activist, but he strongly believed in the idea of communism and that everything happening in the USSR was just and correct. When local party units received a letter by Khrushchev [21] revealing the cult of Stalin after the Twentieth Party Congress [22] in 1956, my husband withdrew into himself. He didn't talk to me about what was going on in their party unit. The denunciation of Stalin was a serious blow to him. He refused to believe that his idol was mean and mendacious. As for me, I believed Khrushchev at once.

When our relatives began to move to Israel in the 1970s, Michael supported and helped them in every way, but he still believed they were betraying their motherland that had given them everything they needed for a happy life. However, he thought that he had to fulfill his family duties and had to help close relatives. He took them to Kiev airport and stayed there with them a whole night. In those years this might have had serious consequences for him since he was a party member. He could have been accused of supporting Zionism and even fired from work, but actually nothing of the kind happened. Emigration to Israel was out of the question for us. My husband couldn't imagine anything like that. He considered it a betrayal of his motherland and his ideals.

I had a good life with him. In summer we went on vacation to the Crimea or Caucasus. We also visited my parents in Makeevka and took our daughter to spend her summer vacation there. We often went to the cinema or theater and read a lot. We were fond of Russian classical and Soviet modern literature. We had many friends and celebrated holidays with them: New Year's, 1st May and 7th November. We also celebrated birthdays. My husband and I didn't celebrate Jewish holidays.

My father worked as a shop assistant several years after the war. He died in 1959. We buried him according to the Jewish traditions. We put him in a casket wrapped in a shroud and a rabbi said a prayer. After he died my mother sold the house and moved to Kiev. She stayed with my older sister Maria since I lived with my husband's parents in a small two-bedroom apartment. Our son Felix was born there in 1968. My daughter Sophia was born handicapped: she suffered from Down Syndrome and was retarded both mentally and physically. Sophia studied in a special school for several years, and then she stayed at home with us. She couldn't go to work. She had a weak heart and lungs which is typical for this disease. I understood that my daughter wasn't going to live long, and for that reason I decided to have another baby at the age of 44. Sophia died in 1993.

We were on the list for families that needed an apartment for many years until we received a four-bedroom apartment in a new apartment building in 1982. My husband was severely ill at that time. He died of stomach cancer in 1983. He was buried in the town cemetery. His death was an irreplaceable loss for me, but sometimes I think it was better that he didn't live to see perestroika: the fall of communism and all ideals that he had held sacred his whole life.

My mother supported me. After my husband died she moved in with me and lived with us until the end of her days. She always observed all Jewish traditions, had special crockery to follow the kashrut, celebrated Saturdays and often prayed. She died in 1985. We buried her in the Jewish section of the town cemetery. An old Jew said prayers over her grave. Since then I've ordered prayers at the synagogue on the days of my mother and father's death and on remembrance days.

My brother Srul lived with our parents in Makeevka after the war. He finished agricultural college in Melitopol and then worked at the Metallurgical Plant in Makeevka. Uncle Gedali, my mother's brother, decided to introduce my brother to a girl. Her name was Fira and she lived in Zguritsa. My uncle sent her photograph to my brother and they began to write letters to one another. They decided to get married without even having seen each other. My brother went to Zguritsa where they had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. The newly-weds moved to Makeevka. Srul and his wife get along very well. They have two daughters: Ania and Tania [Tatiana]. They finished polytechnic college in Novocherkask. We rarely saw each other after the war. He came to Kiev once every 3-4 years, at the most. He supported my mother sending her money and food parcels. In the early 1990s my brother and his family moved to Canada.

When my husband died our son was 15 years old and I decided it was time for him to learn a profession. He finished the Machine Building Technical School in Irpen. He worked as a joiner and turner at the plant and then entered the Metalwork Faculty at the Polytechnic College. At that time perestroika began and people got an opportunity to do business and earn money. My son quit college and began to travel to Poland. He took electric appliances that were in demand in this country and brought back food products to sell in Kiev. Felix lived in Poland for several years. When he returned to independent Ukraine in 1993 he started his own business: training school for masseurs, barbers and make-up specialists. He didn't make enough money and I decided to help him. I started to learn accounting at the age of 70 to help my son. We were floundering in the world of business until we managed to make our way. My son began to expand his services issuing licenses and registering companies. He owns a big law company now. Felix went back to the polytechnic college, this time he decided to study at the Management Faculty. He finished it successfully and will soon graduate from the Faculty of Law of Kiev State University.

My son married a Russian girl called Margarita. They have an 8-year-old daughter called Karina. She's my darling granddaughter. She studies in the Jewish grammar school Simcha. She's very fond of studying Jewish traditions and wants her parents to observe them. I also began to get interested in the Jewish way of life. I can say that my granddaughter helps us to become obedient Jews following traditions and celebrating holidays. Even my Russian daughter-in-law celebrates holidays with us. On Pesach I invited my children, put a dish that I got from my mother with all the traditional food on the table and conducted the seder and my granddaughter asked me the four questions [the mah nishtanah]. On Purim and Chanukkah we attended parties organized by the Kiev Jewish community.

I'm also supported by Hesed. I don't receive any material assistance from them since my son provides for everything I need, but I enjoy their cultural programs. I have friends there and we celebrate Jewish holidays in the so-called Jewish house and attend parties at Hesed. I also celebrate Sabbath and light candles at home.

I've been abroad several times. I went on tour to Czechoslovakia in 1986. In those years, when there wasn't enough food in our country, I was struck by how much they had of everything. In recent years I visited a friend of mine in Germany, my brother in Edmonton, Canada, and my husband's brother in Los Angeles, America. I've also been in Israel. I liked everything there. I admired and felt proud seeing the garden in the desert that my people had created. I visited several towns and bathed in three seas. I went to the Wailing Wall and visited Christian relics. This

is such a Holy Land!

I like traveling, learning new things and meeting with friends, but I always remember a Russian proverb which says, 'East or West, home is best'. Everything I saw abroad is also in Ukraine now: plenty of goods, beautiful cottages and cars. I like it that people have an opportunity to improve their life and do business, earn money and become rich. I don't suffer from the terrible poverty that fell on many lonely pensioners. My son supports me financially, buys me expensive tours to health and recreation centers and I share with him what I have saved: the warmth of my soul.

Glossary

[1] Jewish Pale of Settlement: Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

[2] Russian Revolution of 1917: Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

[3] Great Patriotic War: On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

[4] Civil War (1918-1920): The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

[5] Pogroms in Ukraine: In the 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.

[6] Common name: Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

[7] Keep in touch with relatives abroad: The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

[8] Bessarabia: Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

[9] Russian stove: Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

[10] German colonists: Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

[11] Kolkhoz: In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

[12] Famine in Ukraine: In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

[13] Young Octobrist: In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

[14] Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

[15] October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

[16] Great Terror (1934-1938): During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

[17] Molotov, V. P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

[18] Campaign against 'cosmopolitans': The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

[19] Mandatory job assignment in the USSR: Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

[20] Communal apartment: The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

[21] Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971): Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

[22] Twentieth Party Congress: At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.