

Malea Veselnitskaya Biography

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Natalia Rezanova

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Malea Veselnitskaya lives with her daughter in a three-room apartment on the fourth floor of a standard Khrushchovka house [1]. She has red wallpaper in her rooms and furniture in fashion of the 1980s. There is a big brown carpet on the wall above the sofa and her husband's photograph over the table covered with a flowered plastic tablecloth. She keeps a warning for non-payment of her apartment monthly fees issued her housing department in plain view in her cupboard. Malea Isaacovna is a tall and stately woman. She is wearing a long-sleeved dark cherry knitted dress matching with her gray hair cut short. Her glasses do not hide a warm look in her eyes behind the lenses. Malea Isaacovna has health problems, but she still looks young for her age. She is very emotional and the saddest memories bring tears into her eyes.

My maternal grandmother Malea Mogilevskaya was born in a village in Lubny district, Poltava province in 1866. I don't know her maiden name. She married Ruvim Mogilevski and moved to Kremenchug to join her husband there. They had four children. In summer of 1902 grandmother Malea and her children were riding an open wagon heading to Malea's mother in a village when a snowstorm began. She wrapped her children in her big checkered woolen shawl, but she herself got wet and cold. My great grandmother made her a hot bath when they arrived, but grandmother caught cold that resulted in pneumonia followed by galloping consumption. My grandmother died that same year.

My maternal grandfather Ruvim Mogilevski was born in Kremenchug, Poltava province in the 1860s. [Kremenchug is a district town in Poltava province. In 1987 there were 63,000 residents in the town including 29,869 Jews. The Jews were mostly involved in trade and tailoring.] My grandfather was a beer dealer. He purchased beer at the brewery and sold it riding his wagon to different districts of the town. Shortly after his wife died grandfather married a Jewish woman who had a son. His wife mistreated grandfather's children and chased them away from home, including her son. Their neighbors gave shelter to the children. Grandfather Ruvim kept out of touch with them. At his old age he got blind from glaucoma and died in Kremenchug in 1920. He never made it up with his children.

My mother's older brother Aron Mogilevski was born in 1889. At the age of 13, after his mother died he became an apprentice of a clock repairman. When he started to earn money he rented a room and his brothers and sisters were living with him. Aron married a Jewish woman with a child. Her name was Rosa. In 1913 his master moved to America and Aron went with him. Rosa and her daughter and Aron's brothers and sisters stayed in the town for the time being. Only in 1920 they Rosa with the daughter managed to move to America to join Aron. Aron wrote occasionally to his brother Yuda. He made a good living, but only once he sent Yuda some money to support him.

Shortly before the Great Patriotic War [2] Aron's children, who were born in America, wrote that he died and Rosa died shortly afterward. There were no more contacts with them.

My mother's older sister Chaya was born in 1895. She worked at a stocking shop. She had no education. In 1920 she married Marcus Yoshpa, a shoemaker and became a housewife. Chaya was religious. She observed traditions and went to the synagogue. In 1921 her daughter named Malea after her grandmother was born and in 1923 her son Ruvim named after his grandfather was born. Chaya and her husband's family moved to Tashkent, to Uzbekistan, in 1925. In 1927 her son Shurik was born and then Pavlik, their fourth child, was born. During the Great Patriotic War Shurik, at the age of 15, was eager to go to the front and some distant relative, a professional military, helped him to enter a military school. In 1943 Shurik was sent to the front. He was wounded near Kharkov and died in hospital. Chaya's older son Ruvim was a professional military. His wife Galia was Russian. They had two children. They lived in Fergana, in Uzbekistan. Ruvim wasn't at the front during the Great Patriotic War. In the middle of the 1950s Ruvim demobilized and moved with his family to Rossosh town, Voronezh region where he worked as equipment depot manager. He died of heart attack in 1977.

From what I know Chaya's daughter Malea moved to Canada. All I know about Pavlik is that he is married and lives in Israel with his family. Uncle Marcus died in the 1960s and aunt Chaya died in Tashkent around 1980.

My mother's younger brother Yuda Mogilevski was born in 1900. He didn't have any education. He worked as a janitor and then a loader in a storage facility in Kremenchug. He married a Jewish girl in 1921. Her name was Hana. In 1922 their son Ruvim was born and in 1924 they had a daughter Etia. Yuda and his wife were very religious. They observed all Jewish holidays and went to the synagogue. In 1938 their son Fima and in 1939 son Marik were born. Before the war Ruvim finished a railroad college in Kryukov, near Kremenchug and worked in Kryukov at the railcar depot. When the Great Patriotic War began Yuda's son evacuated to Tashkent and his older son Ruvim went to the front. After the Great Patriotic War Yuda's family stayed in Tashkent. Ruvim was wounded in his right hand and demobilized. He came to his parents in Tashkent and went to work at the aviation plant evacuated from Moscow. He married a daughter of director of this plant. Later he moved to live in Moscow Region with his family. Ruvim had two children. In the 1970s Ruvim and his family moved to Israel and I lost contact with them. Yuda's son Fima was mentally ill and kept in hospital. This is all I know about him. Daughter Etia finished Polytechnic College in Tashkent and married a Jewish man. Her husband was an invalid. After the war Etia worked as an engineer. She had a daughter. Uncle Yuda died in 1979 and his wife Hana after one year. We visited Etia in 1981 when my husband and I came to see our relatives in Tashkent. Etia, her husband and daughter moved to Israel in the 1990s. They live in Ashdod. This is all information I have about them. As for Yuda's son Marik I know that he lives in America with his family.

My mother Dina Mogilevskaya was born in Kremenchug in 1897. After her mother died and the children's stepmother chased them out of their home my mother went to work. She was 5 years old. Their neighbors sent her to work at the tobacco factory. My mother worked at the cigarette loading shop. She had to load tobacco into cigarettes standing on a box to reach the table. When a foreman came into the shop other employees hid my mother. Later she earned by babysitting. My mother didn't go to school. At the age of 14 my mother and her sister Chaya became apprentices in a stocking shop. Chaya learned the profession, but my mother failed. A year later my mother

returned to the tobacco factory where she worked in shifts. In 1916 my mother, Chaya and Yuda gave refuge to Babl Ostrovskaya, an orphan girl. One of their acquaintances brought her to their home. My mother was 19 and had a fiancé. At that time Babl's brother Isaac Ostrovski came looking for his sister. He returned from German captivity. He met my mother and they fell in love with each other.

My paternal grandfather Shlyoma Ostrovski died when he was young and we have no information about his date or place of birth. He lived in Alexandria, in Kherson region. [Alexandria is a district town in Kherson region. In 1897 there were 14,007 residents; 3,735 were Jews.] My paternal grandmother's name was Rosa. She stayed with her three children after her husband died. Grandmother Rosa died a sudden death in 1915 after she received a notification that her son Isaac (my father) was in German captivity and there was no information about whether he was alive or not.

I know very little about my father's younger brother Abram Ostrovski. In his teens he became an apprentice of a hat maker. He married a Jewish girl named Tema. In 1925 they moved to Tashkent where their son Semyon was born. During the Great Patriotic War Abram was at the front. After the war he returned to Tashkent and worked as a hat maker in a shop. Our families didn't have any contacts for some reason. All I know is that Abram died of cancer in 1960.

My father's younger sister Babl was born in the late 1890s. After grandmother Rosa died in 1915, some relatives brought her to Kremenchug where she found refuge with my mother and her sister. Babl had no education. In 1924 she married Moisey Pertsov, a shoemaker. He was a Jew. In 1925 Babl and her family and her brother Abram's family moved to Tashkent. In Tashkent their son Syoma was born in 1928 and in 1934 Matvey was born. When the Great Patriotic War began Babl's husband Moisey was mobilized to the front. He served as a shoemaker in a special unit. He died during an air raid when a splinter injured his back. I saw Babl occasionally in Tashkent. She was a beautiful woman of average height. She had her hair plaited and done in a wreath around her head. She was religious, but I don't know any details. Babl died in Tashkent in the early 1950s. Babl's sons moved to Israel in the 1990s. Syoma died in 1996. As for Matvey, I have no information about him.

My father Isaac Ostrovski was born in Alexandria in 1893. He could read and write in Russian. I guess he finished an elementary school.

In 1914, when World War I began, he was mobilized to the tsarist army. He was captured by Germans. He was in Memel, [Klaipeda since 1923]. Germans treated prisoners-of-war well and my father even had a photograph where prisoners were photographed with chief and guards of the camp. In 1916 my father returned to Alexandria where he got to know that his mother had died and his brother and sister were in Kremenchug. He went to Kremenchug where he met my mother.

My parents got married in 1919. I don't know any details of their wedding. They moved to Alexandria, Kirovograd region. In 1920 my older brother Semyon and in 1924 my brother Ruvim were born. I was born in Alexandria in 1926. That year my parents went to visit their relatives in Tashkent: Abram, Chaya and Babl. They actually intended to stay to live there, but my mother told me that blooming cotton was hurting her eyes and Ruvim had boils on his skin. Doctors said they had to change the climate and they returned to Romny, Sumy region in Ukraine. We lived in two rooms there. We had beds and a wardrobe in one room and a table, chairs and a stove in another.

Mother cooked on the stove in winter and on a primus stove in summer. Father worked in a shop manufacturing shoe polish. Mother was a housewife. In the late 1920s, when NEP [3] was over, my father's shop closed and he lost his job.

In 1931 my parents heard about the Jewish Republic that Stalin was establishing in Far East and decided to go there. We sold our furniture and moved to Birobidzhan [4]. Actually, there was no town built yet and we were accommodated in a wooden barrack in the taiga. My father became a cashier. He went to the bank to receive salary for all employees on a tractor with a tractor driver. My mother was very concerned that he might be killed for money. There were many convicts in the area. My mother worked as a milkmaid. Life was very hard. The hardships were beyond our parents' expectations. Our father's acquaintance from Alexandria helped father to move to Khabarovsk in the early 1932s. We were accommodated in a barrack there. There was no hallway and the door of the room opened into the yard. Our beds were right across from the doorway. Mother hang bed sheets to protect us from the cold, but it didn't help much. Some neighbors were drunkards and spoke in curse language. We had very poor food and never had apples.

Few months later we went to mother's sister Chaya in Tashkent. Neither father nor mother could find a job and our father decided that we had to go back to Romny. He went there alone to find a lodging and a job and later we joined him. We moved to Romny in 1933, but our situation did not improve. There was terrible famine in Ukraine [5]. We gathered potato peels in dump pits, fried and ate them. There came agents from a neighboring sovkhos offering work in the field and payment with bread. My brothers, being 13 and 9 years old went to work there. At the end of their first week Semyon and Ruvim received one eighth of a loaf of brown bread with addition of straw. My mother's brother Aron sent Yuda few dollars from America. Mother bought me a brown sateen dress, cotton pants for brothers, a shirt for father and something for herself in Torgsin stores [6]. Our father had a job where his salary was 360 rubles per month, but it wasn't paid in timely manner. There were lines to buy bread and at times we had to stand all night through to get bread. 20 loaves were supplied to a store for the whole district and sometimes we had to stand in lines few days to get some bread.

In late 1933 our family moved to Kremenchug. It was easier to get a job in an industrial town. My mother's cousin brother on her mother's side Yakov worked at the tobacco factory. He was a member of the Party and chairman of a housing cooperative. He helped us to receive a 14 square meter room where we lived: my father, mother, Ruvim, Semyon and I. We stoked the oven with wood: there was no coal. We stored wood in the corridor. My father and brothers fetched water from a pump 4 houses away from our house. They paid 4 kopecks to the owner of the pump and he turned on the tap. We fetched water for washing the floors from a neighbor living across the street from us. She had a pump that took a long while to pump water. Our mother liked to have the room clean. She brushed the floor with a brush until it gained a color of an egg, washed with water and then dried it. There were white rugs on the floor. We had white starched gauze curtains on the windows. Our bed linen was always clean. We had quilted blankets and pillows and mattresses stuffed with down. Our neighbors bought geese and chickens for Pesach and there was a lot of down. Our mother was a great cook. She knew many Jewish recipes. She made gefilte fish, bean soup, stew and pancakes from matzah. She also made delicious farfelakh. To make it she ground matzah, whipped it with eggs, made thin sausages, cut them in cubes and fried in goose or chicken fat. We had them with broth or without. Mother made delicious pastries on every Jewish and Soviet

holiday: little pies, rolls and bagels. To do the cooking on Pesach mother had chicken fat stocks in ceramic jugs. Our parents observed kashrut, but we didn't strictly observe all religious rules in our family. Father and mother went to the synagogue on holidays. They didn't take children to the synagogue and didn't force us to fast. Our father didn't eat any food or didn't smoke on Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] and our mother only fasted half a day due to her health condition. Our parents spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian to us.

My brothers Ruvim and Semyon went to a Jewish school. My older brother Semyon could read in Yiddish, but he couldn't speak it. His teacher called mother to come to school and said to her 'You must speak Yiddish to him at home!' Mother tried, but my brother was quite reluctant to speak the language. He used to say 'What is this in your language? Well, in our language - he meant Russian - it will be this and this'. When I went to school in Kremenchug in 1934, Ruvim was in the 4th form and Semyon was in the 8th form of a Russian school. Ruvim and I had classes in the 1st shift and Semyon went to school in the 2nd shift. In the evening we did our homework sharing one desk. Mother went to work as a cook in the school diner. She didn't have time to cook at home any more. Semyon got up early in the morning, set the stove and made mashed potatoes or even dumplings. When Ruvim and I came home from school there was lunch waiting for us wrapped in a blanket and tucked in with pillows to stay warm.

Father was assistant accountant in the Communtrans organization: it was equipment yard of the town keeping transportation vehicles, snow ploughs, etc. In the morning father wished us a good day and left for a day. He was reserved and never punished us while mother could even slap us when necessary. If father ever felt like punishing any of us we began running around the table and he was chasing us until he burst into laughing. Our father was interested in politics. There was a plate-shaped radio hanging high in the corner of the room. Our father used to listen to news standing on a stool. Besides, he subscribed to Pravda [Truth, the main paper of the Communist Party of the USSR] and Izvestiya [News, daily communist newspaper published in Moscow]. He wanted to join the Party, but mother was against it. She said if he did he would have to attend their meetings and stay away from home for a long time. Our parents didn't have many clothes. Father wore his work uniform. Mother had few sateen and cambric dresses and one woolen gown. She didn't wear a kerchief. She had curly hair.

In 1936 uncle Yakov helped us to receive an apartment. There was a verandah, kitchen and a suite of three rooms in it. There was an old woman living in one room and we helped and supported her. Mother also supported a Korean neighbor whose name was Nyura. After she had a baby this woman fell ill with tuberculosis. Her mother-in-law didn't like her and my mother looked after the woman until she died. Nyura had meals with us. We had her crockery stored separately. My mother was kind and cheerful and many people in Kremenchug knew about her culinary talents. When in 1936 a congress of Stakhanovites took place in Kremenchug [Aleksei Grigorievich Stakhanov, 1906-1977, was a Soviet miner who exceeded production norms; he gave his name to the Stakhanovite movement of the 1930s, when workers were offered incentives to simplify and reorganize work process], they invited my mother to cook gefilte fish for them. The fish was so delicious that Stakhanovites began to lift up mother. Our neighbor children and children from other neighborhoods came to try 'full-dressed potatoes' - boiled unpeeled potatoes - that she made for all. We got along well with our neighbors. I never took any interest in their nationality or my friends'. I remember that some of our neighbors spoke Yiddish.

There was a big family living in our house: an old man and a woman, their two daughters and their families. I think they were Jews. One daughter's husband was commercial director of an enterprise. He often went on business trips to Moscow and Leningrad. In 1937 [during Great Terror] [7] he was arrested. His wife shouted and screamed and fainted when officers were throwing her belongings out of their apartment. Everyone knew that this man was no enemy of the people, but nobody said a word. Our parents didn't discuss arrests in our presence. In 1939 bread lists were introduced: there was a rate of 400 grams per person. A bread delivery truck parked by our door and on our verandah they weighed and released bread for tenants of our street. They did it by our door since ours was the cleanest apartment. I marked the receipt in a notebook.

I wasn't an outstanding pupil considering my studies; we didn't have manual books. I had beautiful handwriting and I wrote on the blackboard what other pupils had to rewrite into their notebooks. I had wonderful memory and remembered what I was writing. I had 5 marks in history, but I was poor at mathematics. My brother got angry and yelled at me for this. A Russian girl Nina was my best friend. We had parties at school. I remember a carnival on New Year. Our neighbor Nyura gave me pants, a blouse, a guise and a cap from the circus where her husband and mother-in-law worked. My classmates and neighbor children had better clothes than I. It was particularly bad with footwear. Once I cried sitting on the porch on 30 April 1939, since I didn't have shoes to wear on the parade on 1 May. We didn't have any money since there was another delay with my father's salary. Our neighbor discovered what the problem was and lend my mother 10 rubles. My mother and I went to the department store where my mother bought me white canvas shoes with blue, yellow and red laces. I rubbed tooth powder to keep them white and this powder left white tracks when I walked. These shoes were only to be work for special occasion. In summer I walked barefooted in the yard. I couldn't even dream about shoes like our neighbor's daughters had. Their father brought them from his business trips to the capital city. In winter I wore gray thick woolen boots with galoshes and a coat with artificial fur collar. In summer I wore a sateen dress. My mother made me a fancy cambric dress from her blouse and a vest - 'kazakinchik' that was in fashion, from another blouse. We didn't have a sewing machine and mother rarely made clothes. My mother cousin brother Yakov's wife Luba was a dressmaker and she made clothes for us.

My older brother Semyon finished school in 1937 and wanted to continue his studies in college, but this was not possible due to our hard situation: our father wasn't in the position to support him for few more years. School graduates were invited to enter military schools and Semyon entered an artillery school in Leningrad. When Semyon visited home after his first year of studies he brought flannel foot wraps. Mother colored them in brown and made me a new skirt. Then brother sent us presents with our father's acquaintance that went to Leningrad on business: a cotton dress for me, white shirts with a collar, sleeve cuffs and laces for my father that were in fashion, few bars of soap for mother and my brother Ruvim. My brother joined the Party at his school. In 1940 Semyon finished his school in the rank of lieutenant and got an assignment to Shuya, Ivanovo region.

In 1939, at the age of 13, I fell ill with rheumatism and stayed at home through the summer. In autumn my father obtained a direction for me to go to a health center in Slavyansk, Donetsk region. Director of this health center loved children dearly. Her daughter died in a tragic accident and she turned her love to the children in this health center. We felt very comfortable there. I went to the 6th form at school there. I lived for one year there alone, without the parents. In 1941 I finished the 7th form in Kremenchug. Ruvim finished school with honors in 1941. At the final

meeting director of school praised him and our mother was sitting in the presidium for such occasion. Ruvim was awarded 100 rubles and two volumes of Lenin's [8] works. Ruvim was planning to enter a college. They had a prom on 21 June. On 22 June at 12 at noon his classmates got together in our home. They put all rugs aside and were dancing to a record player. They were having lots of fun. At that time Molotov [9] spoke on the radio about beginning of the war. All boys ran to a military registry office to volunteer to the front.

On 25 June 1941 we woke up from the roar of planes. They dropped bombs on the power plant and the power was gone. They came to drop bombs every day. People excavated pits to hide from them. My mother said 'If God can allow innocent people to die, then there is no God and I do not believe in Him. She stopped going to the synagogue. I was a Komsomol [10] member and didn't believe in God. On 5 August Ruvim volunteered to the front. When we came to the railway station from where he was departing, mother told him to write to Tashkent where we were going to evacuate. My older brother Semyon sent us his certificate to receive money allowances. We - my mother, father and I - always tried to be together to not get lost in case of air raid. My father obtained a wagon for evacuation in his Communtrans. We went with aunt Hana, uncle Yuda's wife, with their children, and some older woman from father's work and her crazy daughter that had just gave birth to a baby. They sat on a wagon and walked behind it. On the first evening we got in an air raid. We unharnessed the horse and hid away in the corn fields. A kolkhozniki [from a collective farm] [11] shouted to us 'Are there many more zhydy going with you?' We were afraid of them. We harnessed the horse in the morning and continued on our way. When we climbed a hill we saw Kremenchug on fire. In a big village on our way we bumped into a military unit. Its commanding officer told us to leave immediately since Germans had their landing troops around and we might get into encirclement. We left with another group of refugees walking in their winter clothes on carrying their luggage. We picked apples and other fruit on the trees lining the road. Once we picked watermelons in a field. In one village a Russian woman gave us borsch with chicken meat and gave us pickled cucumbers and a piece of bread to go. My mother said then: 'There are different fishes in a river and there are different people in the world: kind and wicked'.

We came to the railway station in Poltava during another air raid. There were crowds of people and no trains. In the evening a train arrived and we managed to get into it. At night the train stopped in the middle of nowhere and we were ordered to get off. Someone said that chief of the train turned out to be an indecent and irresponsible man. Then another train approached: there were no light indicators on it. We blocked the track, it stopped and a military chief came out wearing his slippers. When he heard what it was about he allowed us to get in. We arrived in Kharkov. The railway station was like an ant house. People were sleeping on asphalt. My mother got through the crowd to commandant of the station. She explained that we were a family of a military and that we had evacuation permits and tickets. The commandant took us to a maintenance train. We arrived at Kinel near Kuibyshev where we waited for a train to Tashkent. Back in Poltava uncle Yuda joined us. He and Hana and the children got into a train for the people going in evacuation and we got a promise to be put on a passenger train as a family of a military. My mother gave Hana all money she received by her certificate since Hana had her two children to take care of. She didn't have a kopeck left. It turned out later that they got meals on the way while we didn't have any provisions as far as Tashkent. In our compartment there was a mother and her son. They borrowed our copper kettle to fetch boiling water and then had tea with sugar and bread and pork fat. They didn't offer

us any and I fainted from smelling food.

In Tashkent we lodged in the summer kitchen of my mother's sister, Chaya's accommodation. Yuda's family settled down in Chirchik in the outskirts of Tashkent. My mother couldn't find a job and my father went to work in stables. He delivered meals to the boarding school of the conservatory that evacuated from Leningrad. I was 15 years old and our acquaintances helped me to get a job in a shop of Tashkent military regiment where I made bridles. I got allergic to leather: I had fever and terrible itching. I made friends with a local Uzbek girl Alia, in this shop. I fell ill with typhoid and stayed in hospital 27 days. Later they told me that in delirium I repeated the name of my school friend Nina. My mother was staying by my bed and my father starved since they spent all their money on me. My mother sold her woolen shawl for 500 rubles and bought two packs of sulfidine for me. The doctors said that it was a miracle that I survived. When they released me from hospital I could only walk holding chairs and often fainted.

After I recovered Alia's tenant helped me to get employment at the radio plant evacuated from Moscow. I turned 16 and had a passport. I walked to work and back home. When it rained the road was washed out and there was a narrow and slippery path along a precipice. There was clay sticking to holes. There were kilograms of clay. Our shop manufactured radios and special radios in soft cases for wounded so that they could listen to the radio in bed. I coiled transformers with a little engine. I worked 12 hours a day. There was a meter. I had to strain my eyes to see numbers on it in the dim electric lighting. Our shop was in a former department store storage facility. There was a window very high from the floor and we actually didn't get any daylight. There was a bulb over each workplace. We worked in shifts: one week from 8 am till 8 pm and another week a night shift: from 8 pm till 8 am. When I worked day shifts in winter I stayed overnight at the plant since it was dark already at 8 pm. The shift switch day was our only day off. I was a Stakhanovite and an active Komsomol member. My monthly salary was 600-700 and sometimes 800 rubles. This money was just enough to buy bread in stores sold per coupons. Our family was starving: we ate zatirukha [a kind of porridge] and made borsch from vine leaves.

My mother's niece Malea worked in a military school. She helped mother to get employed as a cleaning woman in the school. My father was released from the army, but in 1943 he was recruited to the so-called labor army. Its units were involved the construction of defense facilities. Father had duodenal ulcer and might have been released had he insisted, but he said 'I want to go to the front'. He left holding his hands on his stomach. He exchanged everything he had for food on the way, but it was not enough. He was on the train 12 days and had one meal per day - his ulcer opened. In Moscow he got off the train and was sent to work as receptionist in the institute named after Molotov. However, his condition got worse and he had to go to hospital. My older brother Semyon whose unit was moving from Leningrad to Stalingrad Front was going via Moscow. He obtained a permit for few hours' leave from his commanding officers to visit our father. When he came to see him he found our father exhausted: he weighed 42 kg. His diagnosis was: general tuberculosis. My brother left some money with an attendant to buy food for my father. He almost missed his train. We were notified that father died in hospital in 1943 and his body was incinerated.

The local population in Tashkent was friendly. We got along well with Uzbeks, Tajiks, Russians and Ukrainians. Nationality didn't matter. Only once I faced open hatred to Jews. One weekend my cousin sister Etia, Yuda's daughter invited me to visit them in Chirchik. There were crowds of

people at the railway station and we had actually to push into the train when someone pushed me away and said 'Yours are here, too!' 'Who are yours? We are all in the same boat!' – I didn't quite catch what he meant at first.

We lived in terrible conditions in the summer kitchen of aunt Chaya. When it rained the water poured down the walls that were not fixed properly. I wrote my older brother about it. Semyon wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist party of Uzbekistan. Officials from the district Party committee came with inspection and they gave us a room. Well, it was at the world's end, anyway. We heated it with kazanchik: a cone-shaped iron cast cauldron with an opening on the side where coal or wood were loaded. We bought chips or mother rarely bought a bunch of wood. When it rained the water poured down through the roof. Every summer the locals mixed clay with airbricks to install them on the roof. The owner of our lodging didn't do it and we had leakage again and again. I wrote my brother another letter and he complained. We received another lodging in a summer kitchen in the yard of a house that belonged to wealthy owners. It was small, but it had wooden floors, metal roof and a stove. There was a table by the wall and a wooden couch. I came from work, washed myself and went to sleep. I read a little whenever there was a moment. My cousin sister Malea, who worked in a military school, brought me books from the library. I read until it got dark. I didn't light a lamp to save kerosene. I read poems by Simonov [Konstantin Simonov, 1915–1979, Soviet poet who wrote about the Great Patriotic War]. I read the Ice house by Lazhechnikov [Ivan Lazhechnikov, 1792–1869) Russian writer who wrote historical novels], An American Tragedy by Dreiser [Theodore Dreiser, 1871–945, American writer, essayist].

At the end of the war I worked 8-hour shifts. I went to the cinema, theater and discotheques. We went to the musical comedy and Russian theater in Tashkent. We often went to the cinema. I bought tickets for all girls in our shop and later they paid me back. Tickets to the cinema cost 7 rubles. We saw Soviet films: 'At 6 pm after the war', 'A pig-tender and a shepherd' and a 'Slow flier'. There were parties at our plant at the end of the war. My mother received a sateen robe as her cleaning uniform and she altered it into a dress with red rimming for me. One evening a Korean musician played the piano and sang the romance 'Oh, these black eyes'. I was standing in front of the piano and he kept looking at me. He went to accompany me back home, so I had these fleeting dates, but nothing serious. I was very humble.

My brothers wrote us from the front. Ruvim wrote that he was a private in an artillery unit. He was wounded and was in hospital. He met with Semyon near Stalingrad. My older brother was trying to have Ruvim transferred to his unit, but it didn't work. Then Ruvim sent us nice cards from Budapest. Ruvim perished in Sarbogard in Hungary on 6 March 1945. He was 25 years old. In 1983 the International Red Cross helped my husband and me to go to Ruvim's grave in Sarbogard. The gravestone looked abandoned and the red star on it was rusted. We took some soil from the grave and took it to our mother's grave in Odessa.

My older brother Semyon fought near Moscow, Stalingrad. Got in encirclement near Smolensk and took part in the break-through of the blockade of Leningrad [12]. After the war he got to Riga military regiment. He wanted to demobilize, but his commandment sent him to advanced training in Luga. He married a Russian woman Prascovia there. She was a bartender. Then Semyon was sent to Tilsit [since 1946 Sovietsk, Kaliningrad region]. From there he was assigned a commanding officer of a battery in Neman, Kaliningrad region where its

headquarters was. My brother came for us in Tashkent in 1945. He said 'There are few of us left. Let's stick together'. We moved to Neman. My brother and his wife lived in two small rooms. There is no need to say that his wife was not very happy to see us. Officers' wives came from villages and were only interested to talk about their kitchen gardens. I had nothing in common with them. I asked my brother to help me obtain permission to borrow books from the library. Life was so dull there! There was no Russian population in Neman, only Germans. The town was ruined and we were afraid to walk when it got dark. My mother and I always went out together.

Once I attended a party where young people got together to dance to a record player and a young officer paid attention to me. His name was Michael Veselnitski. Shortly afterward Michael proposed to me. I liked him. He was shy and didn't drink. We got married in 1947. We lived in the two-bedroom apartment with my husband's parents in Neman. My husband was born in Shterndorf [today Kalininskoye] village near Kherson in 1919. His parents Sheindl and Moisey Veselnitskiye were probably religious, but any religiosity was out of the question in the military garrison in Neman. When they moved to Odessa I didn't get along with them. They didn't like me and were against our marriage. My husband told me that his grandfather Srul took him to the synagogue and wound tefillin on his finger. My husband and his twin brother Semyon in 1932 entered the Jewish Machine Building College in Odessa. They didn't know a word in Russian, but they picked it up soon. After finishing the College they entered an artillery school in Podolsk, but my husband entered it two years before his brother went to study. My husband finished it in 1939. Semyon went to the front before finishing his school. He was at the front in Yelnia near Moscow. In 1942 his family received a notification that he was missing. My husband's younger brother Yakov was killed at the Kursk salient [13]. My husband's sister Maya finished Pedagogical College in Odessa. She was an English teacher at school. She had a Jewish husband, but they didn't have children. My husband's sister Lubov was a teacher of elementary school in Odessa. She married a Jewish name Mark and they had a son. In the late 1980s the sisters and their families moved to America.

My husband was chief of the topographic department of the military unit in Neman. In 1948 our daughter Ida was born. My brother Semyon's daughter Sveta was born that same year and in 1949 his daughter Rosa was born. He was transferred to serve in Kaliningrad and then in Klaipeda [Lithuania]. He demobilized in 1955 and went to work as chief of special department in the port storing documents from the ships that were sailing abroad. Semyon's wife was a shop assistant in a street shop. Their daughter Rosa finished a pedagogical college in Kaluga and got a job assignment in Ufa where she married a Tatar man Azat Azamatov. They have two daughters: Diana and Victoria. My brother's daughter Sveta is single. She is a tutor in a kindergarten in the port. In 1972 Semyon had a stroke and became an invalid. He died in Klaipeda in 1979.

In 1949 at the height of the campaign against cosmopolitans [14] military doctor Zinovi Braslavski, husband of my mother cousin brother Yakov's sister Maria Braslavskaya was arrested in Lvov. Maria and I were in evacuation in Tashkent together and we corresponded later on. She wrote us that Zinovi was arrested when they were going back home after the cinema. He only managed to tell his wife: 'Write Stalin'. There was no court and he was sent to a camp in the north. Zinovi was kept there 4 years and a half.

My husband demobilized in 1949 and went to Kherson with his parents to settle down there but it didn't work. My daughter Ida and I stayed with my brother in Kaliningrad. I worked in the document

control in the fleet. I worked there two years. My husband became a surveyor in Meliovodstroy Company. Ida and I joined him in 1951. We rented a lodging in Zaslavskogo Street. It used to be a cowshed in the past. The owner installed new floors and whitewashed the walls. We lived there two years. My daughter went to a boarding kindergarten. Later we rented a 16-square-meter room in Novaya Street and I took my mother to live with us. When the owner of the room demanded that we moved out immediately we sued her. A judge promised to help us for 1 000 rubles. We collected this amount, had a favorable decision and received the ownership documents for this room. My husband often went on business trips. I read a lot and tried to interest Ida with reading. My mother and I often sat by the stove and I told her the stories I read. Ida also listened reclining on her folding bed.

I was doing the laundry when I heard that Stalin died, in 1953. Bending over the tub I began to sob and mother also burst into tears. We both kept saying 'What will happen now and what do we do?' We believed Stalin unconventionally. Of course, my attitude changed after I got and read more information.

In 1954 my son Yakov was born. The 'Krushchev [15] thaw' didn't reflect on our family. However, I faced anti-Semitism. I couldn't find a job due to my Item 5 [16] in my passport. My acquaintance Polina Yakovlevna Zhadan, a Jew, helped me to get a job of a cashier in Odessa Machine Building College. I replaced her while she was on her maternity leave. I learned my duties fast and director and chief accountant were happy with my performance. I had a good handwriting and our accountant often asked me to write reports. When the cashier came back from her maternity leave they wanted to make me a lab assistant, but deputy director refused for some over made reason. It was clear that the reason was my Jewish identity. Then I heard about a vacancy of cashier in the College of Credits and Economics. Their human resources manager, a retired military, confirmed that they had a vacancy, but when he looked into my passport he lost interest in me and said that he would send me a card with his reply. Needless to say that I never received any card. I still remember how abusing his spiteful manner was. I couldn't understand what my fault was. I had an acquaintance that was in good relationships with chief accountant of the medical equipment plant and I went to work there in 1960. My husband went to work as a topographer in Ukryuzhgirovodkhoz Company in 1961. He had been on the lists for receiving a lodging for 10 years being a veteran of the war, but only when their organization began housing construction we gained a hope. In 1962 we received a 3-bedroom apartment.

My children Ida and Yakov studied in school #56. They never complained about any anti-Semitic demonstration in their school. They went along well with their schoolmates. After finishing school in 1965 Ida entered the College of Industrial Automatics. When she finished it I helped her to get employment as design engineer at the medical equipment plant. In 1967 she married Alexandr Misyuk. He was a turner at the October Revolution plant. He lived in a hostel. The newly weds came to live with us. In 1968 their son Semyon was born.

My younger son Yakov finished school in 1969. He had concerns about entering a college in Odessa due to his Jewish identity and went to Saratov. My husband's uncle lived there and worked as logistics supervisor at the College of Public Economy. He promised to put in a word for my son. At the entrance exam Yakov was asked why he came to enter this college in Saratov when there was a similar college in his hometown in Odessa. He replied that there was no that specific faculty in

the college. When I received a telegram that Yakov was admitted I went hysterical from joy.

In 1973 I had a surgery on tumor. My colleagues' attitude was very moving. They valued my skills as an accountant and my personal features. One woman whose husband was a pilot and brought caviar from Simferopol said to others 'Girls, this is only for Malea'. My mother often stayed in hospital. She died in 1975 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. There was no Jewish funeral.

After Ida divorced in 1977 my husband and I actually raised our grandson Semyon. In the 1980s my husband and I couldn't afford much. We only managed to buy some furniture on installments. My colleagues and I bought the cheapest tickets to the Russian or musical comedy theaters.

Yakov's son served two years in the army after finishing college and married his fellow student Galia Ignatieva, Russian. They moved to live in Lipetsk where Galia came from, where in 1981 their son Maxim was born. Galia worked in a bank and Yakov was chief of department and then assistant director for planning at the construction equipment plant. Yakov divorced Galia and married Inna Kazakova. She was pregnant, but it wasn't Yakov's baby. The baby was a girl. She was named Dina after my mother. Yakov adopted the girl. He helped Inna to get a job of worker at his plant. Inna only finished 6 years at school.

My husband went to honor the memory of Jews that perished in Shterndorf [today Kalininskoye] village on memorial days. In 1980 I went with him. On our way back we went to see his acquaintance in Kherson. She also came from his village. She told us that on the day when this tragedy happened she and her mother found shelter in a cellar. They pretended to be mute through all four years while Germans were there. The senior man of the village knew them. But he didn't disclose their identity. After the war this senior man had to face the court for serving Germans. This woman went to court to stand for him. This story made a huge impression on me.

When in the late 1980s our acquaintances and relatives began moving to Israel my husband felt like moving there, too. He even went to the visa office (OVIR) and paid our last savings from the pension for application forms. But I told him flatly that I didn't want to move anywhere, that I did want to travel to see the world, but I wouldn't be able to live in another country and I want to live in Odessa. A number of my relatives moved to Israel from Tashkent. I always listen to news from Israel. I sympathize with Israel because there are our people living there. Why do they have to suffer from hatred of the Arabs? I feel sorry for them.

When I retired in 1986 my pension wasn't enough to make a living and I went to work as a vendor at the newspaper stand near our house. This was hard work: it was cold in winter and stuffy in summer. I often heard people saying 'zhydoskaya morda' [abusive and rude expression] about me. I worked there a little longer than a year and a half and quit after they gave me 10-ruble raise to my pension. I received 117 rubles.

I had different attitudes toward Perestroika [17] and the fall down of the USSR. On the one hand, there is more freedom and on the other hand, it's a sorry situation. We were equal in the Soviet country and now there are rich and poor. I don't like this national segregation whatsoever. I never cared about national identities. My cousin brother Semyon, uncle Abram son's friend often visited us in Odessa. He was Uzbek. They called each other brothers. My brother helped him to put his seriously ill son in hospital in Odessa. When this Uzbek friend of his died my brother supported his

wife and son. They were staying in my apartment when visiting and I always had guests from various parts of the Soviet Union. Even those whom I knew little got an opportunity to stay with me. Sometimes we had to sleep on the floor when there were more people than could fit.

Perestroika made life much worse than before. My children lost their permanent job. The Avtoagregat plant where my daughter Ida worked was closed. The plant where my son Yakov worked in Lipetsk was also closed. He couldn't find a job for a long time until he got employed as an accountant in a cooperative that manufactured furniture for dachas. This company was closed, too. My son divorced his wife Inna. She became a drunkard. Yakov has cancer. He's had a surgery and then chemical therapy. Yakov and his third wife Tamara visited me recently. Our acquaintances wanted to find him a job in a company in Odessa, but failed. They returned to Lipetsk. He works as an accountant in a cafe and two other jobs since he needs money for another surgery.

In 1996 my husband died. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. There are graves of his father Moisey and his older sisters Maya and Luba, but according to his will we buried my husband by my mother's grave. My husband and my mother had very cordial relationships while it was different with his parents and sisters. After my husband died Ida and I could hardly make ends meet. We were literally starving and my friends advised me to address Gmilus Hesed. I called them in autumn 1996. They sent a representative. She visited us and put down all necessary information. Shortly afterward I began to receive food packages once a month. Three years ago they offered me free meals that they delivered home. When Ida had her second infarction they began to deliver a meal for her as well. It helps us a lot. I often fall ill. In 2001 I had an infarction and last year I had a stroke. I can hardly walk and often fall. I have very poor sight: -9. A professor of ophthalmologic clinic said that I need a surgery, but I cannot have anesthesia due to high pressure.

I am in a poor spiritual and physical condition. I am very concerned about my children's problems. Ida went to work at a library. Her son Senia Misyuk finished the Road Faculty in Polytechnic College. However, got a job of a worker regardless of having higher education. He works on disassembly of cars in his friend's company. Senia married an older woman called Olga with two children. Their son was born this year and named Misha after grandfather. My grandson Maxim, Yakov's son, lives in Lipetsk. He is married. My grandson's wives' names is also Olga. Both Olga are Russian. I got along very well with my grandsons. I have very close friends. Unfortunately, we are old women now. My Russian friends Katia, who has been my friend for over 50 years, supports me as much as she can. My former neighbor Maria Grinberg, Russian, adopted her Jewish husband's surname. She moved to her son in Moscow, but she writes me that I am like a sister to her.

I identify myself as a Russian Jew. I understand Yiddish, but I cannot speak it. I know little about Jewish traditions. My husband and I never talked about them. I am 77 and I have never been at a synagogue, but I respect religious Jews and I am glad that with this rebirth of the Jewish life in Odessa people have freedom of faith. My children identify themselves as Jews, but they do not pay much attention to Jewish traditions. They are not religious. We do not celebrate neither Soviet nor observe Jewish holidays. I cannot read due to my poor sight, although Ida brings interesting books. I watch films on TV and am interested in politics and events in the world. I am often sleepless at night and then I recall my life. It's a pity I've had more bad than good in it.

Glossary

[1] Khrushchovka: Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in the new neighborhood of Kiev.

[2] 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.

[3] NEP: The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

[4] Birobidzhan: Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

[5] 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.

[6] Torgsin stores: Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.

[7] 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.

[8] Lenin (1870-1924): Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

[9] 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.

[10] 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.

[11] Collective farm (in Russian 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] Blockade of Leningrad: On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

[13] Kursk battle: The greatest tank battle in history of WWII occurred at Kursk. It began on July 5th, 1943 and it ended ignominiously eight days later. The Soviet army in its counteroffensive crushed 30 German divisions and liberated Oryol, Belgorod and Kharkov. During the Kursk battle, the biggest tank fight - involving up to 1200 tanks and mobile cannon units on both sides - took place in Prokhorovka on 12 July 1943, and it ended with defeat of the German tank unit.

[14] 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'.

[15] 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.

[16] Item 5: This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

[17] Perestroika (Russian for restructuring): Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.