

Inessa Vitkina Biography

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I was born in Moscow on 28 February 1933. My mother Tsylia Isaakovna Vitkina was born in Yanishki Shauliai district Vilen region, Russia that is presently Vilnius region, Lithuania. Isaak Vitkin, my grandfather on my mother's side, was born in 1850s in the town of Yanishki where he continued living with the family of his own. He was a shoemaker. In winter he made winter coats. My grandmother's name was Miriam and she was few years younger than my grandfather. I guess she was born in 1860s. I don't know where my grandmother came from or anything about her life before she got married. My grandparents had a big family. My mother was the youngest of 6 children. The family was poor. They didn't have a house of their own. My grandmother did some farming and kept few cows. The children helped her around. Every day after milking the cows my grandmother made cottage cheese and butter and the children went to nearby borough Shauliai to deliver the dairies to their customers. Their family lived on these earnings.

My mother's parents were very religious. There were quite a few Jews in Yanishki. I don't know how many synagogues there were, but there was one for sure. My mother told me that her parents went to the synagogue on Saturday. My grandmother had one fancy black velvet gown that she wore to the synagogue. Granny always wore a wig. I asked Mama once why Granny had such pretty curls when my sister's and my hair was straight. And mama replied that my grandmother had a wig. . They observed all Jewish traditions, celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays and my Granny strictly followed the kashruth. My mother wasn't religious when I knew her. However, in our house they kept dairy product and meat dishes separately. My sister and I still follow this rule. My mother always put salt on meat and soaked it in water. She used to say that she was following what her mother was doing. This means that she still kept Jewish traditions even if she didn't quite realize it. It became her habit since childhood. They spoke Yiddish in the family. Later my mother often talked with my Aunt Leya in Yiddish. The boys and Aunt Leya studied in cheder and a secondary school. My mother was the youngest in the family and she didn't get a chance to study. She had to help her mother about the house. My mother always spoke with resentment that my aunt did get some education, but she herself never got a chance. She had to make clothes for the family and help my grandmother to provide for the family. My mother never got rid of this feeling of jealousy towards my aunt. My aunt could write and read in Yiddish. My mother learned to write and read when she was grown up in Russian only.

I already mentioned that there were six children in the family. There were more of them born, of course, but those six survived. I only knew two children: my Mama's sister Leya – she was called Lina – and her brother Haim. I have bits of information about the rest of children. Two older sons of my grandparents moved to America. I don't know their names. One of them left in 1912 before WWI and another one was at the front during the civil war and left in the early 1920s. Our family

didn't keep in touch with them. One more brother was at the front during WWI and died in hospital from spotted fever. I don't remember his name, but I remember a story about him. My mother and Aunt Lina told me that he was a very handsome young man and a married woman fell in love with him. It wasn't a love affair, but she was in love with my uncle. All we know about her is that her name was Sophia Petrovna. When my uncle was departing to the front she gave him a ring with her initials as a pendant for good luck. The ring didn't keep my uncle safe. After he died my grandmother received a package with his belongings from hospital and there was this ring among them. This was a golden ring but there was no value on it and nobody took it away during the pogroms - I'm going to tell about this later. The ring stayed with our family and when I reached 16 my mother gave it to me as a gift in the memory of my uncle. Now my sister and I have a granddaughter - she is Uncle Haim's great granddaughter. We gave this ring to her as a symbol of love.

Before the revolution of 1917 Lithuania was an outlying district of the Russian Empire. Pogroms began there even before WWI. The gangs consisted of Lithuanians that were fighting for separation of Lithuania from Russia. However, they also broke into the Jewish houses massacring the Jews. My mother told me about one of such pogroms. She was almost 10 years old. She was milking a cow in the shed when she heard terrible noise, screams and horse neighs. She went into the yard and saw her Jewish neighbor being pulled by her hair by a horseman. My mother ran to her home to tell my grandmother about it. My grandmother and her children that were at home at that time hid in the cellar. They left it the following day to find out that bandits killed few people and took away all horses from the village. Everything was turned upside down in the house and my grandmother's ring and her golden chain with mogendavid (a hexagonal Star of David - the Jewish talisman) disappeared. Only the ring was there - I had already mentioned it. There were other pogroms but Mama only told us about this one. The situation with aggression in Lithuania caused Russia some concern and Russia decided to move its citizens from there. My mother's family was ordered to go to Byelorussia. My grandfather died on the way and my grandmother and Leya stayed there to bury him. My mother's older brother Haim and my mother ended in Byelorussia. Later, in 1920s Lithuania separated from Russia. That was how it happened that my grandmother and Aunt Leya stayed in Lithuania and my grandmother's children - Haim and my mother - lived in Byelorussia.

Aunt Leya and my grandmother lived in Vilnius. Aunt Leya worked at the printing house. After the revolution of 1917 Aunt Leya became an active participant in the trade union movement. Her childhood friend Rieva Shwartz from Yanishki moved in with her. Rieva was the same age as mama. She also got fond of the revolutionary movement. They were both good at organizing things, lectured in revolutionary clubs and spoke for the Soviet power. My grandmother died in 1933. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Vilnius. Soon after she died Leya and Rieva got arrested by Lithuanian authorities for their trade union and revolutionary activities. They were imprisoned. Lithuanian authorities released them under condition that they would leave Lithuania immediately. Rieva went to Palestine and Rieva never heard about her any more. The Soviet Union agreed to accept my aunt under condition that she would go to Birobijan. In 1934 Aunt Leya left Lithuania for Birobijan. She lived there for a year and in 1935 she moved in with us in Grozny. She lived with us her whole life and we were her only family. My aunt was an accountant. During the war she evacuated to Stalinabad with us and stayed with us after the war. Aunt Leya died in 1973 in Chernovtsy. She died in her sleep. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Chernovtsy.

Now I'll tell you about the family of Uncle Haim that lived in Byelorussia. At first Uncle Haim and my mother lived in Vilyuye, but then he got married and moved to Krichev with his family. My uncle worked at the printing house. His wife's name was Faya. She was a very beautiful, fair-haired Jew. They had 5 children. The oldest is Ida, then came Naum – they are both living. I also remember Isaak (Izia), Lev and their daughter Maria – they passed away. Ida studied at the Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad before the war. During the war she was in the blockade and in 1942 she was taken out of Leningrad. She joined us in Grozny and we all evacuated from there together. Naum was in the Navy during the war. He lives in Vladimir now. Naum is very ill. His wife passed away. He has a son and grandchildren. His son lives in Minsk. Ida lives in Tel-Aviv, Israel. She turned 80 last year. My sister and I visited her in Israel to celebrate her 80th birthday. 4 family generations got together there. Uncle Haim died in 1960 and Faya lived 4 years longer.

After Haim got married my mother moved to Bobruysk. She worked at the printing house. As she was constantly exposed to lead she got ill with eczema. She had to quit. Later she was sent to Moscow to take a course of kindergarten teachers. After finishing the course she worked at the kindergarten in Bobruysk. Children always loved her. Until the last days of her life children came to our house to play with her. They told her all their secrets. Mama was a very wise and smart woman even though she had no higher education. She was educated but she was too shy to write. She always asked us to write official papers because she learned to write when she was grown up and felt awkward about it.

Mama was an activist of the Jewish movement when she was young. I guess, in the 1920s the Party authorities encouraged Jews to speak Yiddish and cultivate their Jewish identity. Authorities were opening Jewish schools and Jewish theaters. There was such period but it passed by promptly. Young Jewish people were active in their effort to improve things. But even at that time hardly any of them could speak Yiddish.

My father Andrei Nikanorovich Koshkin was born in 1895 in the village of Ozeriye Novo-Konstantinovsky district Riazan region. My father was Russian, a Christian. I know very little about my father's family. His ancestors were serfs. My father's great grandfather, a serf, was whipped to death. My grandfather Nikanor Koshkin was a carpenter. That's all I know about him. My grandmother Maria married my grandfather when she was 15 and she gave birth to 18 children. Only the oldest and the youngest of them survived. My father was an older son. When he turned 8 years old he became a tinsmith's apprentice and later he became a turner. During the revolution he was a turner at a plant in Petersburg. In February 1917 my father became a member of the Communist Party. During the civil war of 1914 - 1920 he was in the Red army. My father had a younger sister Lidia. I know no details about her life. I only know that she died in 1934 and my sister received her name after her.

My parents met in Moscow when my father was studying at the Communist University. He was finishing his post-graduate studies and my mother was at the training course for kindergarten employees. This communist university prepared propaganda and political specialists. My parents didn't leave us any details about how they met. They didn't have a wedding party. They even didn't register their marriage officially. At that time this was an ordinary thing. There was no nationality specified in my and my sister's birth certificate and later we had to prove our Jewish identity. It was particularly difficult for my sister. The registry office issued her birth certificate on

death certificate form, as they had no birth certificate forms left.

I was born in Moscow on 28 February 1933. Our parents were living at the hostel then. When I was born they tried to choose me a name. My father suggested Klara or Rosa in honor of Klara Tsetkin of Rosa Luxemburg, German revolutionaries. My mother wanted to give the name of Galina. However, there was a Spanish woman in that hostel. She got a baby and named it Inessa. My parents found it a beautiful name and decided to name me so. When I was born my father had problems with his party activities and even had to face the court. Therefore, my mother gave me her last name – Vitkina.

Grandmother Maria, my father's mother, visited us in Moscow when I was born. But she refused to stay with us helping my mother to raise me. My grandmother told my mother that she had raised her own children and that my mother had to take care of hers. My grandmother had a house in the village, but my sister and I had never been there. My grandmother died before the war. My mother said that my grandmother couldn't forgive my father for his marrying a Jewish woman and that their marriage wasn't sanctified by the church. The relationship between my mother and my grandmother was tense and my grandmother showed no affection toward me or my sister. I know that my father always sent some money to my grandmother.

In 1930 the case against Industrial Party began. This was the beginning of Stalin's terror. The authorities arrested and sentenced the leadership of the Industrial Party and then, beginning from 1933 they arrested the people that were acquainted with prisoners in one way or another or were employed by them. In 1934 my father was arrested. Besides other accusations he was blamed of having relatives in America (my mother's older brothers). My mother hardly remembered them due to a big difference in their age. My mother wasn't in any contact with them, to say the least of my father. But he was charged of almost sending them intelligence information. My father rejected all these absurd accusations at the preliminary sitting of the court. He refused from having an attorney and defended himself during the whole course of the case. As a result of all his suffering Papa fell ill with diabetes that caused his early death. We had Papa's notes of his speech in court, but after his death NKVD took away all his papers. When I was in the first form I had to prepare a report about the Great October Socialist revolution. Papa wrote me a draft. They even took away this notebook. I don't know the details of the court but Papa was discharged of all accusation. As my father was close to Stalin opposition circles our family had to leave Moscow. My father was offered a job at the oil fields in the Caucasus. In 1934 my parents moved to Voznesenka village, Malgobekskiy district, Chechen-Ingush ASSR. My father became manager of an oil field. My sister Lidia Koshkina was born there on 11 October 1934. We lived in a small house at the bottom of the hill. In less than a year my father was transferred to Grozny where he became secretary for propaganda in the regional Party committee. After we moved to Grozny my mother didn't work any more. As my mother had eczema she couldn't do any housework and we had a housemaid. My mother couldn't even hold Lida to breastfeed her and somebody had to do it for her. When Lida grew up and could eat from the bottle feeding her became my responsibility. I didn't mind as I liked to look after the little ones.

In Grozny we lived in a big 4-storied apartment building in a 4-room apartment. My father had a study and my sister and I shared the nursery room. When I got ill and stayed alone in the room it seemed huge to me. When our Aunt came to live with us she was given a separate room. With Aunt

Leya's arrival my sister and I became close with her. This was the first time when we heard Yiddish – my mother and my aunt talked in Yiddish. They switched to Yiddish when they wanted to discuss something that we were not supposed to hear. But my sister and I got to understanding Yiddish very soon. We lived a good life. My sister and I went to kindergarten, involved in active social life. We had many friends regardless of their nationality. In those years this was a matter of no significance. There was no anti-Semitism. Only during evacuation we heard the word “zhyd” or “Jewish” for the first time. I fell ill so often in my infancy that Lida very often attended the kindergarten without me. We liked the kindergarten. Our teachers read us fairy tales, we drew and staged performances. They paid us a lot of attention in the kindergarten.

My sister and I also had an adult friend. He was my father's driver, a young Chechen man. He was a very nice man and he loved children. My father got angry with him once, although it was my fault. The driver was waiting for my father and I asked him to give a ride to other children, our friends which he did. My father didn't want us, children of secretary of the regional party committee secretary (this was the most respectable and important position in town) to enjoy anything that other people couldn't afford. He didn't even allow himself to have what others didn't have. He had one leather jacket that he was wearing his whole life. He had one suit. Later Mama made me a skirt from it. He was one of those communists that were convinced that they didn't have a right to afford themselves what other people didn't have. Once the Party committee delivered strawberries to all its employees and mama accepted it. But Papa made Mama take all berries to the kindergarten. My sister and I were no different from other children in our yard. Maybe our toys were a little better, because our father was deputy of the Supreme Soviet and went to Moscow often. He brought us toys from there but we always shared them with other children.

My sister and I learned to read before we went to school. Mama taught us to read from the books of Russian classical writers Pushkin, Turgenev, etc. Reading has always been our favorite pastime. I remember our first New Year celebration. It was before the war in 1940. There was a New Year tree for all children of our building. We saw little rabbits and bears wrapped in silver and golden aluminum paper for the first time in our life. There were tangerines, oranges and apples under the tree. All neighbors decorated the tree together and made decorations along with the children. There were no decorations sold in stores at that time. We had the tree in our apartment. The children sang and danced and received prizes. New Year became our favorite holiday. We didn't celebrate religious holidays at home. It wasn't possible – my father was secretary of the regional party committee and a communist. Communists were to be atheists. However, Mama used to get some matsa at Pesah somewhere and we all enjoyed eating it, even Papa.

Repression of 1937 didn't touch my father. He was far away from Moscow. Many of his colleagues were arrested in Moscow and Leningrad. My father had other problems. The situation in Chechen-Ingush republic grew worse. [Grozny – capital of Chechen-Ingush republic]. Chechens were fighting against the Soviet power and against occupation for their independence. Few party committee employees were killed. My father got a gun and all employees were told to take their weapons when leaving the house. But I remember that Papa never took his gun with him. He left it in the drawer of his desk.

In 1939 German army entered Poland. We had a radio at home and listened to the news about the war. I don't think this was extensive information but they said in the news that Germans were killing Jews purposely. At least they were chased away from Poland and Czechoslovakia. Polish

Jews, refugees, began to arrive at Grozny. At that time the word “Jew” didn’t have a link to Mama or us.

In 1940 I was to go to school. But schools were closed due to the war with Finland. They housed hospitals. Mama and aunt Leya often went to help at the hospital. After the Finnish war the authorities were training everybody, even children, to use gas masks. I remember a tent in our yard filled with some gas. We were to put on the mask properly and enter this tent to check whether we did it correctly. We kept our masks at home. All food was sold for food cards. Only lolly-pops and sweet rolls could be bought without cards. But we still didn’t have any premonition about the war. We were convinced that we were so strong that nobody would dare to attack us.

I remember 22 June 1941, first day of the war. It was Sunday, the only day when Papa could stay in bed longer. I turned off the radio. Papa promised to take Lida and me to the Circus and we were waiting for him to wake up. We were walking to the circus when some of our neighbors said “where are you going to? We’re in the war!” So we heard about the war. Papa was very angry with me for turning off the radio. In the first days of the war all adults began to dig up trenches. Tenants of our building were digging up the trenches behind the building. We, kids, were bringing them water. I got sunstroke then. But it was quiet in Grozny. Bombing began in 1942. In 1941 I went to the first form at school. I changed 9 schools during my first form. The schools were transformed into hospitals and children went to another school. We studied in two and then in 3 shifts. Lida was in the kindergarten. Evacuated people began to arrive in Grozny. We let one room to the evacuated family: the husband worked at a plant and his wife was a doctor in hospital. There was a hospital not far from our house and Mama went to help them.

I remember the first bombing in 1942. We went onto the balcony and one of the adults said loudly so that my sister and I could hear “Here’s a thunderstorm” and then quietly “Germans are near”. The planes were dropping bombs and the noise was terrible and everything around was on fire. The next day children were playing in the yard when air raid alarm was on. Everybody ran to hide in the basement and I was collecting my toys. Then I raised my eyes and saw a German plane flying very low.

In 1942 our family was evacuated. They evacuated Jews and communists in the first turn – they knew that Germans had no mercy for them. This was the second year of the war. Grozny wasn’t occupied yet, although the armies were fighting near the town. The town was on fire and it was dark even during the daytime. Meanwhile they suspended evacuation, but all Jews had been taken out of town by then. In 1942 our cousin Ida, Haim’s daughter arrived from Leningrad. She survived the blockade – the horrible famine. And the first thing she did after she escaped was buying about half a bag of black flour that she brought with her. When I opened the door I didn’t recognize her and ran to Mama to tell her that some gipsy with a sack was asking for her. Ida visited us before – a beautiful woman with long hair. After the blockade she looked terrible – black and thin. Ida still never throws bread away; she either finishes it or makes crusts. I believe all survivors of the blockade do the same. The five of us – three of us, my aunt and Ida - went to the evacuation. Ida’s father, Haim, was on labor front in Leninkan, not far from Grozny. He was 50 years old then. I don’t know where his family was at that time. Haim had a big family: his wife and four children and his wife’s sisters. One of them was married and another was single. The married one lost her husband in the war, and his two daughters died in the evacuation.

We evacuated to Stalinabad (now Dushanbe – capital of Tadjikistan). My father stayed in Grozny to fight the fires. Then my father decided to go to the front. My father had a friend that had his arm amputated. The two of them were involved in sending trains with soldiers to the front and they decided to go. But they were ordered to get off the train, as one of them was without an arm and another had diabetes.

We were getting ready for evacuation. My parents were told to take only the most necessary things. Mama took her sewing machine. This sewing machine rescued us during and after the war. Lida was begging Mama to allow her take her teddy bear and a toy wardrobe for doll clothes. We only took her teddy bear. My father had a huge collection of Russian and foreign classical literature and I hated to leave the books, but my father took them all to the library. Our trip lasted from June till the end of August. We went to Baku by train. In Baku we changed for an overcrowded ship. The weather was stormy and everybody got sick on this boat, people, luggage and all unimaginable mess of everything. We crossed the Caspian Sea and took a train from Kislovodsk. The train often stopped because of the bombings. In Stalinabad few families and we got off at an alley near the railway station. It was warm and then it began to rain. A railway man that lived near the station took us, children, to his home. The adults stayed behind. We lived in the open air for some time. Later an evacuation point was arranged at the stadium and we moved there. When we were there I faced anti-Semitism for the first time in my life. Some boys called one boy a Jew and were about to beat him. I stood for him saying “Stop beating him! I am a Jew and he is a Jew, so what”. I didn’t know what this meant but I knew they shouldn’t beat him. This was the first event of this kind, but unfortunately, not the last one.

Later railroad people accommodated us in the barracks. Few families shared one room. Later my mother received a separate room of 6 m². Only a bed and a table fit in there - that was all. The three of us lived in it at first until Papa joined us. Aunt Lina got a job in “Tadjikkarakul” trust. She and Ida moved to the hostel. We had almost no space in our room. If one needed to go out at night he should have watched his step. Papa slept on the table. Lida and I slept under this table. Later we received a room with a verandah in an apartment. We didn’t have a kitchen, though, because a people from Leningrad lived in the kitchen. There were Jews, Armenians and Lithuanians in this apartment, but the issue of nationality was of no significance.

My father stayed in Grozny until January 1943. By this time the town had burnt down. They said that people were putting oil fields on fire because they didn’t want Germans to get them. The situation in town was alarming. My father had severe diabetes. He was sent to Moscow to get treatment, but he asked permission to go visit his family in Stalinabad. In Stalinabad party authorities were in need of a propaganda specialist and they persuaded my father to stay. My father went to hospital and took to his work when he was out. He went around the villages to lecture and organized discussions there. We hardly ever saw him. Almost after each trip my father got to hospital. He died in hospital. When he was in hospital he called us to come there. I was 10 years old. My father said that we ought to know who our ancestors were and began talking about them. What he told us in hospital then is all we know about our grandfather and the others. He died on 17 August 1943. We didn’t come to the funeral. The family decided to save us from grief. They didn’t tell us that Papa died.

My mother became a widow at 38 with two small children to bring up. She received a small pension for my father. But during the war my mother had to provide for the family. She could make clothes and even slippers. My mother met a woman from Western Ukraine that could sew as well. They were buying military overcoats to make women's coats that they were selling. Mama decided against taking a job. She thought she could do better with sewing and she was providing for us.

After we came to Stalinabad in 1942 my sister and I went to the Russian secondary school. My sister went to the first form and I went to the second form. Later the schools were divided into schools for boys and schools for girls. Then I was transferred to another school. Children studied in two shifts: boys in the morning and girls in the afternoon. Mainly evacuated children studied at this school. There were two or three Tadjik girls in my class and the rest of us were from other towns. Each summer we went to pick up cotton. We also went to a hospital to meet with the wounded, read and write letters for them and make concerts. During the war I became a pioneer. At school we made tobacco bags and gloved and sent them to the front with little notes from us. There were many children in the house where we lived. Many parents were at work and I looked after the younger children. When their parents stayed at work overnight I took the little ones to our place and put them to bed. Tadjik people taught us to cook plov – stewed meat with rice and herbs. Each of us brought something: some rice or a carrot and we made plov for all of us. We also learned to make another delicious meal: fried some flour, added some cotton plant oil, dried this mix a little – and it came out very delicious. We played a lot. My sister and I read whatever we could get. During the war we read books that didn't have a beginning or an ending. We didn't even know the title or the author.

Local people treated us nicely. There was no hostility in their attitude and there was no national hostility. Once we happened to be at the real Jewish wedding with a rabbi and huppah. We didn't quite understand it but it was interesting to be there.

We often fell ill. My mother and I had malaria. Then Lida and my aunt fell ill. This was some rare 3-day malaria.

A theater from Leningrad was evacuated to Stalinabad. Two famous actors lived next door to our apartment. All people knew in advance about the victory. I heard all news standing in line for bread – it was my responsibility. I had friends there. There were homeless children begging for a piece of bread. I always gave them some if I got a smaller piece to make the weight. There were many homeless children. I brought the news about the end of the war. We all got together at the apartment where these two actors lived waiting until they declared that the war was over. This was on 8 May 1945. The next morning, on 9 May, the radio announced our victory. All people went outside. They were kissing, embracing and dancing and crying for the lost ones. We ran to the hospital to share the joy with the wounded. Ma has said us that father to perish only after the war several years.

When the war ended Mama didn't want to go back to Grozny where everything would remind her of Papa. We had neighbors from Chernovtsy (this west of Ukraine) in the evacuation. They told us that they received letters from those that were back home there telling them that this town was not destroyed and that schools and colleges were open. Mama decided to go to Chernovtsy. I remember we arrived there on 11 October 1945. I was 11. At first we lived there with our acquaintances that had arrived in the town before us. The border was opened then and the local

families were moving to Rumania. Mama found an apartment to buy from the family that was leaving. Mama and aunt sold all our possessions to collect the money to pay for the apartment. There were four of us there: Ida stayed in Stalinabad to finish her studies and later she joined her family in Mogilyov.

Lida and I went to Russian secondary school. There were children of different ages in my class. There were older children that were in a ghetto during the war and there were boys that fought on the front. There were 40 children in our class and only 3 of them had fathers. The following year we were transferred to school # 2. It was a school for girls, like a grammar school. There were many Jews in the school both among children and among teachers. The majority of the population in town was Jewish. I liked social activities. I was a pioneer leader in two other forms. When I became a senior student I took the children on tours to Kiev and Odessa. I did well at school. My sister and I liked literature and mathematics and physics. We had a wonderful History teacher. Life at school was interesting. We became Komsomol members at school, but there was no ideology involved. We just got our Komsomol cards and badges.

Persecution of cosmopolites in 1948 went past us. We were officially Russian, although we never rejected our Jewish identity. Mama had a typical first name and patronymic – Tsylia Isaakovna. If we heard any anti-Semitic talk we tried to terminate it reminding the others that we were Jews. Anti-Semitism was everywhere then, both on everyday and on the state level. Because of my mother’s nationality I couldn’t enter the university, the radio physics department that had just opened then. Nobody of our acquaintances suffered from the “doctors’ case”. At that time the best specialists were Jews. People in Chernovtsy still say that there have been no more good doctors left since the Jewish doctors moved to Israel. The majority of people didn’t believe that the doctors encroached upon Stalin. They only could say “It can’t be!”

We were enthusiastic about Israel. Mama said with tears in her eyes that at last the people have got their own land. Until she died Mama always watched news about Israel and felt sorry about any events that could do harm to this state.

In 1951 I finished school. After I failed to enter the radio physics department I went to Novosibirsk to enter the University of Cybernetics that was also called a “bourgeois pseudoscience”. I made friends there. When I was a second year student I fell ill and doctors advised me to change the climate. I went to city Gorky in Russia to University. Only they offered me the programming department although I was theoretical mathematician. But I agreed. There were lecturers from Moscow in Gorky University. I had pre-diploma practice in Moscow and prepared my diploma thesis in Moscow. I graduated in 1957 and got a job assignment at the Institute of Earth magnetism in the vicinity of Moscow. In 1957 the authorities issued a decree about foundation of Siberian department at the Academy of Sciences and we were all sent to work at this Department. We lived in Moscow for two years. I worked at the Institute of Earth magnetism, department of Earth electricity. Later we all moved to Novosibirsk, including our lecturers. We were the first to start and work at this department. After we arrived we all worked at the Institute of mathematics that was built for us. Later they built computation center. I received a room in Novosibirsk and then – an apartment. Mama, Lida and aunt Leya were in Chernovtsy. Then Lida entered Kiev University. She finished school with a silver medal and only had to pass an interview to enter the Physics department. I visited her in Kiev. Mama continued earning her living by sewing. When the two of us

went to other towns to study she helped us sending parcels and money. We had a two-room apartment in Chernovtsy and Mama leased one room to students. All students that lived there remained her friends. They even visited her later with their children and grandchildren.

Stalin died in 1953 when I was still a student. People stood in the streets crying. We had a mourning meeting at the University. We were standing in the guard of honor beside the portrait of Stalin. I cried sincerely, just couldn't hold back my tears. I was crying all day through. There was only one thought "How are we going to live without Stalin?" But gradually we were coming to understanding the real status of things. By the time of XX Party Congress we were quite prepared to what Khrushchov said in his report about the cult of personality. It didn't come as a shock to us. At that time we thought of Stalin's death as of the rescue of the country. Mama's reaction to Stalin's death was different, though. I understand she knew about what was going on in the country from my father. She didn't grieve for Stalin, although she was wearing a black arm-band when going out. But it was a formality for her.

Lida got a job assignment as a teacher of physics at school after she graduated. This school was at the railway station Cheliabinsk-Yuzhny. This whole area was a penitentiary zone where criminals were imprisoned. Lida worked at the evening school there. She was teacher of physics, mathematics, chemistry, astronomy and even English due to the lack of teachers. She also had to give few classes a week to the inmates of the prison. The teachers were escorted there but the discipline was excellent there. There were gifted people among the inmates. Lida worked there a year. Mama had an infarction and Lida had to come back to Chernovtsy in 1959. Lida couldn't find a job at once in Chernovtsy. She worked at school for two years and then she got a job of an engineer at the laboratory at the chemical plant. Then my sister decided to continue her studies. She went to Moscow to take a post-graduate course at the Moscow Institute of steel and alloys. She studied there from 1967 till 1970. She wrote her thesis, but then she fell ill and had a surgery. She didn't defend her thesis. Lida got a job assignment as a teacher of physics in Briansk at the Institute of Railroad Transport. She worked there 3 years. Then Mama got worse and my sister had to go back to Chernovtsy again. She worked at a plant and retired from the position of the leading engineer meteorologist with a good salary. But then it was a period of perestroika leaving her with a miserable pension.

In 1970s Jews started moving to Israel. There were meetings held at where the immigrants were working to condemn them for leaving the USSR. But my sister and I had a different attitude towards those people. Many of them were our friends and acquaintances. We sympathized with them and acknowledged their right to choose the country of living.

Mama died in 1984. By that time the Jewish cemetery had been closed. She was buried at the Jewish corner of a town cemetery.

In 1990 I was a pensioner. Lida lived alone. I wasn't feeling well and I decided to move in with her. I'm still a Russian citizen. We get along well with one another and my sister likes me to be with her. She doesn't have a family of her own and I'm single, but we feel all right to be together. I'm thinking of moving to Chernovtsy for good.

I've already mentioned that my sister and I were in Israel at our Cousin Ida's 80th birthday. I also have many friends in Israel. We visited them, too. We liked everything in Israel: their life, culture

and people. But we haven't decided about moving there. We have a life of our own here. Besides, it's difficult to change things at this age. We also would feel ashamed to go to the country as pensioners when we did nothing for this country.

Frankly speaking, my sister and I have things to do here, in Ukraine. The Jewish life has restored in the recent years. We participate in all activities at Hesed. We even participate in "Purim-Shpil" there. We attend lectures, hobby clubs and lead an active Jewish life. There is a community of progressive Judaism in Chernovtsy that we attend. Every Friday we meet Sabbath there. We always cook for holidays. We've got recipes of the Jewish dishes and cook sweet and sour stew, stuffed fish and strudels and try to follow the kashruth. In our old age we've returned to the Jewish way of life and to our roots. We cannot say that we are very religious, but we find Judaism the most logical, humane and wise religion. We do not belong to orthodox Judaists, but we do belong to the progressive ones. We've learned Hebrew for over a year. We can't speak it fluently but we never miss our classes. We also study at the University of the Spiritual Heritage of the Jewish people. Our acquaintance wrote a letter there and they made me their regional representative. They send us tapes about Jewish history, traditions and culture. We have a group of people get together to watch these tapes and discuss what we learn. We work as volunteers at Hesed. We have five people to take care of. We visit them once a week and talk with them. We feel that we are needed here and that our life is just beginning.