

Lubov Ratmanskaya

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My family background

I am Lubov Ratmanskaya. I know only about my grandfather and I know nothing about my great-grandfather. I was born when my grandfather died. His name was Leib Ramantsky. That's why all girls who were born to the Ratmanky family were named Lubov, and all the boys, Lev. Kiev was outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement [1](#), but my grandfather was allowed to live in Kiev as a craftsman. He was an ink maker - he made ink according to his own recipe. His sons were allowed to live in Kiev until they came of age, and his daughters, until they got married. His family lived in Podol [2](#).

Grandmother Etya-Hannah Zlotchenko was born in the town of Talnoye, Kiev region. I don't know much about my grandparents' life. They had a very good family. That's why their children turned out very well. They had seven children: Aro-Shloyme, Tsipa, Noah, Vera, my father Isay, aunt Manya and aunt Makhlya. All the children had some profession.

My grandparents were religious. Some of their children and grandchildren were religious, too, and some weren't. My father didn't tell me about the life of his family before the Revolution of 1917 [3](#). Before 1917 they didn't hide their Jewish origin, but afterwards, somehow it didn't seem the right time to talk about it. I only know that the family was very poor.

My father's elder brother, Aron-Shloyme, moved to America. He invited his brother Noah to America - the brothers found jobs there. But I don't remember what their professions were. I think something to do with commerce. And later Noah invited his nephew Mikhail. Aron-Shloyme's children were committed communists. His son, Misha Ratmanky, was born in 1900. He was head of the Podol District Committee of the Komsomol [4](#) in Kiev. In 1919 he was the commissar of a unit made up of Komsomol members from Kiev who went to fight the ataman Zeleny. People say that a note was pinned on the doors of that district committee, which read, 'Committee closed. All gone to the front.' Misha died in July 1919. A street in Kiev was named in his honor.

Aunt Manya was a nurse, and during World War II she was at the front. In general she worked in different military hospitals. Aunt Vera and aunt Makhlya were tailors.

My father, Isay Ratmansky, was born in the 1870s. He went to cheder for a short time. While he lived with his parents, until he came of age, he studied embroidery - he worked on special embroidering machines. There are no such machines any more; they disappeared during the war. My father's teacher was Russian, and my father often stayed at his house. My father was very talented. He embroidered dresses, fabric. I had a coat made of astrakhan fur, and even though we were so poor that I couldn't get buttons for it, it was very nicely embroidered. Unfortunately, I have nothing left of his works; everything has been destroyed. There were many Russian embroiderers in Kiev. I remember Fedorov very well. I remember him because when Petliura [5](#) came to Kiev, he brought his banner to my father to embroider. My father refused. My mother begged him on her knees. It was very dangerous for him to refuse. Then I, a preschooler, was sent to Fedorov, who embroidered that banner and we gave it back to Petliura's soldiers.

My mother and father got married through embroidery. Traveling to different cities in search of a job, my father found himself in a workshop where my mother was sewing coats, and my father began to work there as an embroiderer.

My mother, Sofia Ratmanskaya [nee Smekhova] came from the town of Pogar, Belarus. She was born in 1886. Her father was a tin-maker. He also had seven children: Monya, Khaya, Etya, Sosha, my mother Sofia, Riva, and Yakov. There were two brothers (the elder one died of tuberculosis) and the rest were women. By the way, uncle Yakov was also a tin-maker. His son Ilya was a pilot during World War II, later he was a colonel and lived in Leningrad.

My mother and father got married in Pogar. It was a small town. My father was involved in some revolutionary group, so he was given a false passport under the name of Pasternak and he was illegally sent to Tsaritsyn. My mother went with him. My elder brother Abram was born in Tsaritsyn in 1908. I don't know any details of my father's revolutionary activities. He never talked about it. But my brother was Jewish, so he was circumcised in secret: father found a rabbi in Tsaritsyn and received a special certificate for Abram. Abram is Jewish, but his skin is very dark. Later, the group that helped my father sent him to Vladikavkaz. It was some time around 1909.

There was a good Jewish community in Vladikavkaz, but my father had a passport under the name Alexander Sokolov. [He was given this typical Russian name to hide his Jewish origin.] My sister Vera and I were born in Vladikavkaz. We weren't registered anywhere because my father was only able to register us later - that's why my passport says that I was born in 1911, whereas I was actually born in 1909. Vera was born in 1912. We were beautiful children.

Growing up

We lived in an underground flat, and my mother told me how scared she was every time the police came. The flat looked like a sewing workshop. My mother worked as a tailor and sewed dresses and some other things, pretending she had other sewers there, while my father embroidered. I remember when we already lived in Kiev and our house hadn't been bombed yet, I saw a postcard from some general's wife, saying 'Mrs. Sokolov, please prepare this and that for my arrival'. My mother was a fully-fledged member of the revolutionary organization.

My mother told me how once the police misunderstood the name of a person and for some reason came to our house to look for somebody called Shimon Sak. There may have been such a person in another organization. My mother showed them the documents for Alexander Sokolov, and the police left. Then my parents immediately decided to move from Vladikavkaz. It was in 1917. We left the town immediately after the February Revolution. I remember Vladikavkaz only a little.

At the end of 1917 we came to Kiev, to my father's parents. My grandfather had already died, but grandmother continued to live in the same house. My father's older sister Tsipa also lived there. The flat was big. I remember one very big room where all the Ratmanskys who lived in Kiev at the time came together once - I'm not sure why, maybe it was a holiday or someone's birthday. Aunt Tsipa and her husband had horses and a stable. Her husband drew horses very well. Every time we would come over, he would draw horses for us. Their son Pinya became an artist. His children still live in the same street that we lived in.

Later, because my father was an embroiderer and his work was in demand, my parents found a flat. It was a 5-storey building made of bricks. We lived on the first floor, but it was high. We had a separate flat. There was one small room, which my brother and I often entered through the window. It was hard to climb through that window, but my brother could do it. Then we had a big room and the third room opened from here, but it was right next to the toilet, so it was practically impossible to live in it. We lived there for a short time but then it became impossible - we hardly ever entered it. To get to the kitchen we had to go downstairs, to the end of the long corridor. The kitchen was small, but it was ours, separate from the neighbors.

After my sister Nadya was born, we four children, our parents and one of my father's relatives lived in this flat. My father's youngest sister Makhlya and her husband lived with us for a long time. Then Manya also lived with us for a while. Sometimes we rented that room out.

We lived very poorly. For instance, I can't even remember my bed. Our sister Vera was always very weak and neither Nadya, Abram nor I ever complained that she alone slept in a real bed. That bed stood in the small room where our parents slept, and Vera and later our youngest, Nadya, slept with them. In the beginning we children slept in the children's room, but later it was impossible to stay there. I remember we had scarlet fever there and we stayed in bed; naturally, we weren't allowed outside. So our friends - children from our backyard - jumped in front of our window and talked to us. Whilst I was suffering badly from the disease, Abram and Vera stood at the window and talked to them. Those children called to us, 'Come outside!' My brother answered, 'We can't we have scarlet fever!'

Our life was very hard because when the Reds, the Whites or the Poles came it was hard for my parents to decide whom they should embroider for and whom not. When the NEP [6](#) began life became better. We even had enough to eat: we had white bread, butter, and when mother went to the market, I usually went with her. But in general we were always thin and weak and never had proper clothes. Vera was sick almost all the time. We had one coat that our mother sewed for us from an overcoat, and we wore it in turns when we had to go to school.

We certainly had no new toys, but our relatives brought old ones sometimes. All the Ratmanskys treated each other very well. Most of the time we sewed dolls on our own.

But we always celebrated holidays. My father was religious and raised us the same way. So I knew everything from an early age. In spite of being an atheist later, I still know all about Jewish traditions. And this is due to my father. We had celebrated seder night. We always celebrated all holidays, even when we had to hide in order to celebrate.

On Chanukkah I remember that mother lit candles and we knew why she did that. For some time she also lit candles on Sabbath, but then she stopped because she was afraid and also because we didn't have any money. I also remember Purim, when mother made hamantashen, and we threw a lot of herbs for some reason.

Most of all I remember Passover. We had a table laid with matzah and other necessary stuff: a piece of meat, maror, etc. We even found the hidden afikoman, and then asked presents for it. We sang along with my father. He was a wonderful singer! All members of our family sang well. The grandson of my father's eldest brother graduated from a music college and won a lot of competitions. Vera is a wonderful musician. Her teacher was Henrich Neigauz [a very famous Russian pianist]. When he heard her he took her to Moscow right away. My brother Abram sang in the synagogue where my father took him. My father also sang in the synagogue. Abram sang well. And when the Opera wanted to have a children's choir, the leader of the choir took him to the Opera and Abram sang there as well. The Opera wasn't far from us and my brother ran home one evening, grabbed me by the hand and pulled me to the Opera. That's how I saw the first opera in my life. I also remember that my brother sang in Carmen. This gift for music came from our father. We sang a lot at home. My father didn't only sing Jewish songs: before I went to the music school I knew all the arias from the operas because my father sang them all. Sometimes he sang revolutionary songs. He would put Nadya, Vera, me or Abram on his lap and sing and embroider on his machine. And thus we remembered all the songs. I can still sing some things, but the songs I learned in the music school and the songs I learned from him are a little mixed up in my memory. But father sang many songs that we were never taught at the music school, for instance, some spiritual songs.

My parents had practically no education. I have some of their letters and I can see that they were not very well educated. But my father knew literature very well. Mother liked to read very much. During military communism we lived in a house in Proreznaya Street and when there were shootings we hid in the basement. There was no light in the basement, and my father would recite works by different writers by heart to all who hid with us. I should add that all the Ratmanskys were very talented; it was a wonderful family, where each member felt the need to learn always more and more.

My mother read Russian literature. She couldn't read in Yiddish. She spoke Yiddish very well and knew about Mendele Moykher Sforim [7](#) and Bialik [8](#). She told me that in our room in Proreznaya Street the portraits of her parents hang on one wall and the portrait of Mendele Moykher Sforim, on the opposite wall.

When my brother went to school I was very jealous and I insisted on going to school as well. I was 6 years old when I first went to school. I went to school at a young age and at first they didn't want to admit me. The school was Russian, but there were many Jewish children. I remember that the director treated me very nicely.

I also remember that we had to wear school uniforms: a brown dress and an apron, first white and then black. We didn't have money to buy the uniform, so my mother sewed me a uniform from two pieces of material. But when I - being very proud of my new uniform - came to school in it, my director told me, 'Don't wear it anymore. It's not supposed to look like that.' With tears in my eyes I came home and my mother said, 'Oh, right, I forgot.' There were several children who didn't wear uniforms.

The director was a good woman. I liked her. I only got very worried when she checked how clean we were. During those checks we had to take off our clothes and I was very ashamed of having old underwear, sewn from different pieces because there were other children with beautiful new underwear. I hated those checks. They took place three times a year and they brought me severe sufferings.

We had good old teachers there. One of them, Yekaterina Alexandrovna, organized balls at school and taught us to dance. Once my father came to watch the ball and danced mazurka with this teacher! Can you imagine? Neither he nor my mother ever learned how to dance but they could dance all the fashionable dances.

There were many interesting things for me at school. I wasn't very good at mathematics. I was the weakest student, probably because I was the youngest. But my teacher, Feofan Kondratyevich, drew the class' attention to how I asked questions and didn't pay much attention to how I solved mathematical problems. He treated me very well. He once even asked my parents to come to school (closer to my graduation) and told them that I should go to the theatrical college. But my parents were skeptical about it; moreover, I was already studying in the music school.

But I was very good at reciting poems. Once, the son of a watchmaker invited my friend, Sarah Shkurovich, who was from quite a rich Jewish family, to take part in a competition of reciting poems. She refused to go alone and said she would take her friends. So, she took Sonya Grif, me, and I took my sister Vera, and we all went to the competition. And all of us recited poems. And I won the first prize. I was awarded a book for this, but it remained in Kiev and was certainly destroyed during the war. My teacher of mathematics gathered children who could recite poems at school. And he invited me too. He gave me poems to learn and I recited them at different competitions.

We spent most of our free time in the yard. We had a wonderful yard. I even have pictures of my friends from my backyard. We had mostly Jewish friends. There was only one German girl, Kaufman, but she was older than us. There was also a shoemaker who lived under our flat. He was a drunkard but a very nice man. He had a daughter, Nastya, who visited him often, and I made friends with her, too. The rest of my friends were Jewish: Sonya Grif, Luba Grif, Sarah Shkurovich (they moved to America). We played different games, but our favorite one was hide-and-seek. We also liked to stage different plays in the yard. We played in the yard, our audience was made up of other children, and we came up with ideas for the plays. Most of the plays were about fairies and queens.

I don't remember any Jewish traditions in the yard, but my father took my brother and me to the synagogue - not often, on major holidays only. Once my friend Sonya invited me to the wedding of her aunt Tanya. There for the first time I saw a chuppah. There were also boys of our age who helped with the wedding. It was a rich family, they had a store where they melted figures for

tombstones, made decorations and sculptures. It was right next to our house. They had a wonderful signboard, but the workshop was in the basement.

On the other side of this store was a store that sold furs. It belonged to Rozenberg who had a daughter called Khaya. They lived in our house on the fourth floor, if I'm not mistaken, and they were very rich. They had a dacha, and once their mother took me to the dacha with them but I didn't like it there, it was a very different atmosphere.

I heard about pogroms mostly at the music school. There were many children from families that suffered pogroms. I was told that the Russian and the Polish elite lived in our building in Proreznaya Street. During the Civil War [9](#), in the yard of No. 19 - it's a cinema or a club now, back then it was a headquarters - I saw dead bodies. But I can't tell you for sure that it was a Jewish pogrom. I only know that when the Germans came there were no dead bodies in that yard. I never thought much about my Jewish identity. Maybe because my whole environment was Jewish.

We got into the music school very simply. Abram sang in the choir of the Opera and the leader of the choir once asked him, 'Abram, do you have any brothers or sisters?' He said, 'Yes, I have sisters.' The teachers said, 'Why don't you bring them here?' So, we came and were tested and admitted. All of us, even Nadya who couldn't walk very well yet. I was her tutor. I always held her by the hand. We were taken by different teachers: Abram was taken by Rabinovich, Vera and I were taken by Zovitskaya, and Nadya was taken by Israilevich. But Nadya couldn't be taught music. She had a musical ear, just like Vera and Abram. And she never wanted to play from music. Everything she played, she played by ear. So, she finally ran away and didn't go to music school any more. She was a wonderful musician. Finally, she went to work as a sound technician at a film studio.

My ear was a little worse. As Abram's teacher Rabinovich said, if I had been alone, without Vera, Nadya and Abram, I would be outstanding. But I went to music school almost every day, because we didn't only have piano lessons - we also studied history and listened to music. We had wonderful teachers: Pelman, Razumovskaya, Yavorsky, Beregovsky. Yavorsky came to teach us occasionally, Balchevsky-Balch, Bertye. My teacher, Zovitskaya, was outstanding.

There were a lot of concerts. At the park where symphonic concerts were given tickets were very expensive. So, Steinberg, who was very kind and loved children, issued us a ticket for 20 people! He once met us when we came to the rehearsal, talked to us, saw that we understood and felt music; he also listened to some of us playing (the best ones, of course, not me). So, he saw that we lived with music and supported us. That's why he issued us a ticket for 20 people and said, 'Please, come, even though it's bad for you to walk late at night, still please come.'

Once my friends and I couldn't get in to a concert. But we still wanted to go very much. So, I climbed through some fences and dirt, but I was caught by the guards. I said, 'Steinberg invited me!' Of course they didn't believe me. But suddenly Steinberg was walking up to us. The guards said, 'Listen, this girl claims that you've invited her. Tell her to stop lying!' And he said, 'Oh, of course she's invited!' And I was allowed in to the concert. He liked everybody who loved music so much. Later I met him in Moscow. He lived in the dormitory of the Conservatory. He recognized me and invited me to visit him. He was a very, very good man.

At home we only spoke Russian. In the beginning we didn't know Yiddish at all. We heard it for the first time when we moved to Kiev. Sometimes father and mother spoke in Yiddish, and we would say, 'Oh, our parents are speaking 'kalya-malya-fe' again. Vera began to go to a Jewish school, so she could read and write in Yiddish a little bit. But that school was far away and it was hard to get there, whereas my school was very close, so Vera was transferred to the same school as me. So, we spoke Russian, while students of the Culture League spoke Yiddish. They laughed at us a little bit, but we taught everybody to speak Russian.

The school of the Culture League gave us everything. That's why I want to do so much in my life, to get everyone 'infected' with my school. Our school was wonderful and our teachers were wonderful. It was at the school of the Culture League that I first realized that I was Jewish. It was a real Jewish school. Before that I had no idea that people were different. But here we were given Jewish books and we had Itsik Fefer and David Gofstein come and teach us. Noah Lurye taught literature. He organized a literary club. He told us about Bialik, Mendele, Sholem Aleichem [10](#). He also told us about Russian poets and writers. I still remember poems from that school. We had a very good newspaper in Yiddish and Russian that we wrote. We also had some real poets visit us. We were always very impressed when it happened. They talked to us, recited their poems. Then we would recite poems to them.

It was a purely Jewish school. It was in this school that I learned to speak Yiddish; only Yiddish was spoken there. But we weren't only taught Jewish subjects. M. Beregovsky led our children's choir. We sang Jewish folk songs that he brought from his expeditions. One of the girls, Feigele Zelikovskaya, that finished our school became a popular singer. She had a wonderful voice and I still remember the song she sang in our choir. We also sang Mozart's Requiem and staged an opera in which children acted and sang. Then we decided to compose our own opera. We wrote a libretto, music (Vera did most of that) and staged it. It was called Fairy Tale about Fairies. I played a prince. He had different fairies come to him: fairy of freedom, fairy of beauty. And at the end we sang together. The opera was in Yiddish.

As pioneers we also staged some plays, but these plays were distinctly proletarian. They were about fighting and revolution. We knew very well that there were rich people and poor people. For instance, rich kids learned how to play musical scales first. At our music schools we never learned that. We learned to play real works of music from the very beginning. We always laughed at those rich kids who had to learn those special scales and exercises. We also had eurhythmics at school, and our teacher, Marya Petrovna Levitskaya (who was Jewish) always told us that eurhythmics was more important than ballet. But my friend Veta Feldman and I liked ballet more and we secretly took ballet classes.

We always walked around together with friends and our pioneer leader Vitya. We went to see many plays at the theater. It was all very spontaneous. We were silly. We couldn't even speak Yiddish or Russian correctly. Vitya Khanchin taught us to speak Russian properly. He then married an artist from our school, Riva Magid.

Most of the children in the school were 8 to 15-16 years old. Many were from the Jewish shelter, the orphanage. The orphanage was in the center of Kiev. It was a big flat on the fourth or fifth floor. One room was for the girls - for younger and older girls - but they didn't have many boys for some reason, so the boys had a small room to themselves. There were around 50 children, mostly from

outside Kiev, from very needy families or families that suffered from Jewish pogroms. Food was good there: potatoes, cabbages, sometimes even meat. It was always enough. When we had nothing to eat at our home we were sent there for a while and we gained some weight. There were three teachers and a governess - Tsipa Ratmanskaya [Lubov Ratmanskaya's cousin]. The owner was both a teacher and the director. The children did everything with their own hands. The Fourth Printing House in Kreschatik Street [the main street of Kiev] helped this orphanage financially. We gave concerts at this orphanage and also in some clubs.

Our life was very hard, and, in 1926, I went to work. Everybody wanted to be a worker with a red scarf back then. I was sent to work in an office, and at first, I was horrified by this work. But I got a wonderful profession there. I worked in a bank in Kreschatik Street and soon became a bookkeeper. Then I entered the English department at university. Then I went to Moscow to the Institute of Foreign Languages. At that time it was called the Institute of New Languages. But this institute was merged with a technical institute and we were supposed to become engineers who knew a foreign language. Well, we learned neither technical things nor language. So, I transferred to the economics department. Finally, in 1932, I found myself in the Engineering and Economics Institute, which I finished in 1937. Part of my diploma project was in English.

I went to Moscow because my sister Vera went to study at the Moscow Conservatory because of Genrich Neigauz. We were afraid to leave her alone, so I went to Moscow. Vera was a very talented pianist. In the morning I'd go and feed her, and then I went to work and to study.

At my Institute I suddenly learned that two boys from our group were arrested. They were simple Russian boys. They disappeared. And other people disappeared as well. At the university we organized a registry office for those students who wanted to get married. We were afraid to live together without getting married. I got married then. My husband's name was Vanya. He was a Cossack. We registered at our students' registry office because we were of different nationalities. We lived together for 4 months, and then he was arrested. He was arrested because he studied at the French department where there were only two boys: my Vanya and a French Jew. They were good friends. So, the French Jew was arrested first, and then, Vanya. Once I sent him some money (10 rubles) when he was in prison, but when I came the next time I was not allowed to pass him money. There were many officers in the reception room, and one of them told me in whisper, 'Girl, don't ever come back here.'

During the war

I got married a second time in 1941. My husband's name was Izya Kogan, he was Jewish. I worked at a radio plant, and he, at the sound recording factory. He recorded the speeches of Stalin and others. On the first day of World War II, he went to join the propaganda unit. He came home twice and the last time he came he brought four kilos of chocolate. Four kilos, when nothing at all could be bought in the stores! I didn't work then. And he got this chocolate and brought it to me. Then he left and I never saw him again. We lived together for one-and-a-half months.

During the war I lived not far from the Red Square. I was left absolutely alone because many people evacuated. I was working at the State Department for Highway Control, whose chief was my friend's husband. I didn't have any documents (they went to evacuation) but he knew me well, so he hired me. I worked there till 1942, when I learned that my mother died in Tashkent.

This is how she and my sister Vera got to Tashkent: they were at a dacha in Svyatoshino in the summer of 1941. Usually, Vera's husband, Kayum Kayburov, a famous violin player, took her to a sanatorium in the summer, but that summer there was some cultural festival and he had to be in Kazan. He was highly evaluated as one of the few Kazakhs with a university education, and he was also a wonderful violin player. They met at the Conservatory. So, in the summer of 1941, my mother went with Vera instead of Kayum. The war broke out unexpectedly. What could they do? Nadya and her film studio [Dovzhenko] were evacuated to Tashkent, and she insisted that mother and Vera should also go there. When I learnt that my mother died, I went to Vera in Tashkent. I cried all the way because I knew that my mother had died but Vera was told that she hadn't died, but that she had lethargic sleep. I brought Vera to Moscow from Tashkent, but I couldn't save her. She died in 1943 of a heart attack.

Father stayed in Kiev. I still have his letters. He never asked for anything in his life, but this time he suddenly wrote me and asked for money because he had nothing to eat. I sent him the money and, miraculously, he got it! He wrote me that he went to the market and bought meat. And I wrote him to leave Kiev immediately, but he didn't want to. He remembered the behavior of the Germans during World War I, so he stayed. After the war, Vera was told that when everyone was told to gather their belongings and go to the square our father said, 'We will be led to death,' and didn't take anything. He was killed in Babi Yar in 1941 [11](#). My brother Abram was also killed, just as his wife Musya Rudnik, and their children Gena and Lara, and Musya's mother, and father's sister Vera Lyakhovetskaya. We aren't sure whether she was shot in Babi Yar, or whether she just died. But she died.

My mother's family lost my cousin Anya Rodnyanskaya [the daughter of her sister Khaya Smekhova] and her little daughter, and Bella Frumkina. They were killed in Belarus.

We had very big family - about 80 people: 32 cousins, with children and grandsons, 10 aunts and uncles. Some left for Israel, some went to America. Some of them (father's nephews) stayed and still live in Kiev. My cousin Lev Gertsenshteyn is the leader of one of the Jewish communities in Moscow. We have always made an effort not to lose contact and wrote each other letters. Some came to my 90th birthday. In order to mention all of them I'd have to write a long book.

After the war

After the war I lived in Zubovsky Boulevard and worked at the housing department as the chief of the planning department. But then two departments merged and I was fired. Later I was asked to return to work because I was good at accountancy. But my boss, Puchkov, was an awful anti-Semite; he tried to make me sign some papers about the fulfillment of plans that had never been fulfilled. He yelled at me, tried to throw me out of his office. But I was bold. I told him, 'I didn't come to work for you, but for the Soviet power.'

It was at that time that I entered the Institute of Foreign Languages. But my boss wouldn't let me off work to take exams. He said to me: 'Who will let you go to university? You're Jewish!' But I still graduated from this institute. Then the campaign against cosmopolitans [12](#) began and I was fired because my boss found somebody else for my place. I was fired despite the following facts: I had two university degrees, Y. I. Pisareva only had secondary education. I had worked for 10 years and lived in Moscow since 1930. She had only worked for less than 2 years and lived in Moscow since 1950. I lived in an official flat (I lost my own during the war). She had her own flat and lived there

with her husband. I was a member of the Communist Party, and she was not. I was Jewish and she was Russian.

I believe no commentary is needed. According to the first four items they had to keep me. But because of the item 5 [13](#) I was fired. For a long time I couldn't find a job. My friend, a Russian, who had studied at the Institute of Foreign Languages with me, said to me, 'I don't believe that you can't find a job because of your nationality. Our department needs a person who speaks English. I'll talk to my chief about an interview. If you don't get this job, I'll believe that it's because of your nationality.' I went to the interview, interpreted some conversations on the phone in English, got answers to a number of questions, and made a written report to the chief. He was very pleased with me and wrote a note to the chief of the personnel department. The chief of the personnel department sent my documents to the personnel department of the Ministry. I didn't get this job. My friend said, 'You were right, it was only because of item 5. Then another friend suggested that I should go to another institute to ask for work. The chief of the information department there asked me to translate an article, then took me personally to the chief of the personnel department. The chief of the personnel department opened my passport and asked in astonishment, 'How dare you to ask for a job here!' When the chief of the information department learned about this he said, 'Well, the personnel department will probably start doing our work soon.'

I had five friends at that time, all Jewish, and we were like sisters. We often discussed dangerous topics and were very concerned about Israel. I am still concerned whether Israel will withstand everything or not, and this relates to the question of whether the Jews will survive or not. If only one [nuclear] bomb is thrown at Israel, she will be gone and with her, a great number of Jews, too. That is why we were against the creation of the State of Israel, just because it was dangerous and would make it possible to get rid of many Jews at once. We talked a lot about it. We knew very well where Golda Meir [14](#) lived and we often went to that street. We wanted to go and visit her some time, but we understood that we shouldn't.

When I was working at the sanitary-engineering company, the chief engineer there was a Jew. He once whispered to me, 'If I could, I would walk to Israel on foot.' And he had a Russian wife.

I had very good bosses at the sanitary-engineering company. At that time I met Lev Susovich. In the beginning I didn't think anything. I was 40 years old and I thought my life was over. Suddenly he invited me to the stadium. I said I was not interested in such things. He said, 'But what if I'm trying to court you!' I asked, 'Why would you?' and he said, 'What if I want to live my life with you?' He was very handsome, highly educated; I could talk with him about everything. But I told him that I wasn't interested in married men. He asked, 'Who told you I'm married?' (Before that he had told me something about his daughter). I asked, 'How come you're single and have a daughter?' And he said, 'Different things happen in this life.'

Lev came from Volnovakha. When he was a boy he ran to the front to fight in World War I. By the way, this saved his family. His father, a Jew, was a merchant of Guild I [15](#). And only because Lev had fought at the front were they allowed to sell their house and his father was not arrested. They moved to Donetsk. Lev studied there, but he didn't finish university because the authorities suddenly remembered that he was 'socially inappropriate'. He worked with Bulganin [16](#) in Moscow, then he was arrested with all of them, then he fought at the front during World War II. He worked at a company next to ours, and that's how we met.

Lev courted me for 2 years. We got married and lived together for 25 years until his death. He was always very caring and nice. He had a daughter, Natasha. Her daughter Katya is like a granddaughter to me. Katya is now married to Dima Shekhtman, who is a professor, physicist and mathematician. They live in France. But they come here twice a year. Katya's children, Masha and Sholom, are my great-grandchildren. They call me Luba.

I'm retired. I worked until 1989. I was 80 when I retired. And I retired only because our institute was closed down, otherwise, I would have kept working. I always want to learn new things. Right now I would gladly start learning about computers.

Regrettably, I have never been to Israel. I always wanted to visit it, but it didn't happen. At the time it wasn't possible. When I was young I wanted to leave for Israel forever, but even to think about this was dangerous before the 1980s. Afterwards, when they all started to leave, I was already over 70. But at such an age it's much more difficult to change from an accustomed lifestyle.

Glossary

1 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population (apart from certain privileged families) was only allowed to live in these areas.

2 Podol

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

3 Russian Revolution of 1917

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

4 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.

5 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders

of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

6 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.

7 Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835-1917)

Hebrew and Yiddish writer. He was born in Belarus and studied at various yeshivot in Lithuania. Mendele wrote literary and social criticism, works of popular science in Hebrew, and Hebrew and Yiddish fiction. In his writings on social and literary problems Mendele showed lively interest in the education and public life of Jews in Russia. He was preoccupied by the question of the role of Hebrew literature in molding the Jewish community. This explains why he tried to teach the sciences to the mass of Jews and to aid the people in obtaining secular education in the spirit of the Haskalah (Hebrew enlightenment). He was instrumental in the founding of modern literary Yiddish and the new realism in Hebrew style, and left his mark on the two literatures thematically as well as stylistically.

8 Bialik, Chaim Nachman

(1873-1934): One of the greatest Hebrew poets. He was also an essayist, writer, translator and editor. Born in Rady, Volhynia, Ukraine, he received a traditional education in cheder and yeshivah. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1901 in Warsaw. He established a Hebrew publishing house in Odessa, where he lived but after the Revolution of 1917 Bialik's activity for Hebrew culture was viewed by the communist authorities with suspicion and the publishing house was closed. In 1921 Bialik emigrated to Germany and in 1924 to Palestine where he became a celebrated literary figure. Bialik's poems occupy an important place in modern Israeli culture and education.

9 Civil War (1918-1920)

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

reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

10 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

11 Babi Yar

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

12 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 antisemitic 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'.

13 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.

14 Golda Meir (1898-1978)

Born in Russia, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

15 Guild I

In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

16 Bulganin, Nikolai Aleksandrovich (1895-1975)

Soviet military and political leader. He held posts in industrial management, was mayor of Moscow and chairman of the state bank before World War II. He was made a full member of the politburo in 1948 and also defense minister under Stalin. He was premier from 1955 to 1958. Bulganin was accused of having sided with the 'antiparty faction' that opposed Khrushchev in 1957 and was expelled from the central committee of the party in 1958.