

# Engelina Goldentracht

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Kiev

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## My family background

My grandparents on my mother's side, Aron and Matlia Stravets, lived in the town of Ekaterinoslav [regional town of Dnepropetrovsk now] in the south of Ukraine. I have no information about where they were born. They must have been born around the 1860s. My grandfather may have come from Pinsk. I have no information about my grandparents' families. I don't know my grandmother's maiden name.

My grandfather was a building contractor in Ekaterinoslav. He built houses. He had a construction crew. He developed construction designs and managed construction processes. He didn't have any professional education, but he was very skilled. He constructed several houses in the town. He didn't have his own house. His family lived in a four-bedroom apartment in one of the buildings that he had built in Philosophskaya Street in the center of town, near the synagogue. There was a living room, my grandparents' bedroom, a children's room and my grandfather's study in their apartment. In his study he had a desk, bookcases with books on construction, and a drawing board.

My grandfather was a caring husband and father. At the beginning of the 20th century, when many Jews were leaving Russia in search of a better life, my grandfather also decided to move to America. He went alone to settle down and bring his family later, but he only reached Madrid. He became so homesick that he had to return home.

My grandmother Matlia was a housewife. They had five children: Abram, born in 1896, Rachel, born in 1898, Bencion, born in 1900, my mother Lubov, born in 1902 and the youngest, Maria, born in 1904.

My grandfather Aron wasn't religious. He didn't go to the synagogue. They celebrated Pesach at home - out of respect for old traditions. They spoke Russian in the family, but they knew Yiddish very well. My grandfather believed that it was very important for the children to get an education. He spent all his savings paying for their education. All of them had teachers at home; they studied to read and write, French and German, manners and literature, and finished grammar school. They had many books at home: fiction, Russian and foreign books on philosophy and economy. They read books by Gertzen [1](#) and Maxim Gorky [2](#). There were quite a few of Karl Marx's works in their

collection of books. There were also other books about revolutionary movements and communist ideas. Those were read with great interest and discussed in the family. The result of the good education the children received was that their oldest and favorite soon, Abram, became a revolutionary.

After finishing grammar school Abram graduated from the Law Faculty of the University in Ekaterinoslav - he took an external degree. He was a very intelligent and talented man and finished the whole law course in two years. He became a lawyer at the age of 19. But he didn't work - he became overwhelmed with revolutionary ideas. Abram organized an underground Bolshevik unit in Ekaterinoslav that published flyers and a newspaper. Abram's name in the party was Pavlov; it was a pseudonym. Abram corresponded with Bolshevik leaders. He also wrote books about the poor, their hard work and misery, about the revolution and happy life in Russia in the future, and sent them to Maxim Gorky for review. Gorky sent him very warm recommendations.

My grandfather Aron was against Abram's revolutionary activities. He argued with him and even stopped communicating with him for some time. My grandmother Matlia was on her husband's side, but she also supported Abram. She even helped her son with the distribution of the newspaper. He also asked her to go to the market square to see whether people were reading his newspaper and flyers.

His underground group was about to be exposed to the authorities and, in order to continue their revolutionary activities, they moved from Ekaterinoslav to Kharkov. But there Abram's group was reported, and all of its members were taken to court in 1916. My grandfather Aron found out about the court sitting and came to Kharkov. He didn't even mention it to his wife. The judge sentenced Abram and his assistant to execution by hanging. Grandfather was near Abram during the execution. The executioner offered to blindfold them both, but they refused, and grandfather was looking into the eyes of his beloved son until the last minute.

Grandfather returned to Ekaterinoslav and only said to his children, 'Your brother is gone'. He fell severely ill shortly afterwards. He stayed in mental hospital for two months and became taciturn and reserved after he returned home. He couldn't talk to his family about Abram. Once he got together with his friend Zamanskiy and told him the story of his son's execution. His friend realized that my grandfather told him the story on purpose, so that he would tell it to Matlia and the children. He visited them when grandfather was away on business and told them about Abram's execution. When grandfather returned home, they all pretended they didn't know a thing about Abram, and nobody dared to talk to him about it until he died. After his son's death grandfather turned to God and became a deeply religious man. He believed that God had punished him for his heresy and searched for atonement in his prayers. Every morning my grandfather put on his tallit and tefillin and prayed. He began to go to the synagogue. But he couldn't change his children's convictions. They were very enthusiastic about the revolution of 1917 and the Soviet power.

Rachel, my grandmother's oldest daughter was born in 1898. She entered the Medical Institute in Ekaterinoslav after finishing grammar school and graduated in the first years after the revolution. She was a physician in a hospital in Dnepropetrovsk. She was married. Her Jewish husband Misha Gurvich, also a doctor, was in evacuation with their son Abram, named after Abram who had been killed, during World War II. Misha was released from the army due to his poor eyesight. Rachel was recruited to the army in the first days of the war. She worked at a front line hospital. Rachel was

sickly, but she couldn't afford to get ill at the front. She died a few years after the war. Her son became a builder. He was construction manager at the airfield construction site in Izhevsk. He got married there and stayed in this town. He died in 2001.

Bencion, my grandmother's younger son, graduated from the Construction Institute in Dnepropetrovsk. Bencion specialized in the construction of cinema theaters and cinema sites. His wife Sonia was a doctor. They had two sons: Abram and Galiy. Abram was at the front during the war, and Galiy perished in a plane crash during training in pilot school. Bencion died in the middle of the 1960s in Dnepropetrovsk.

My grandmother's youngest daughter, Maria, also became a doctor. At the institute she met a young Russian man, Yuri Grigoriev, and married him. My grandfather took it dramatically. He was very religious at that time, and he never forgave Maria for this marriage, but he always helped her when she was in need. Upon graduation Yuri and Maria worked at a hospital in the country where they both got their job assignments. Later they lived in Dnepropetrovsk. Their daughter Nelia became a chemist. She lives in Kiev with her family. She lectures at the Road Transport Institute. She has a Ukrainian husband named Parkhomenko, who was Minister of Higher and Professional Education in Ukraine at one time. They have two children and three grandchildren. Maria died in Dnepropetrovsk in 2001.

My mother, Lubov Stravets [1902-1970], finished grammar school for girls in 1917. She was very close with her older brother Abram. She was very influenced by him and performed his assignments. She became a member of the Bolshevik Party after the revolution. During the Civil War [1918-1921] she became a member of the revolutionary committee. [Revolutionary committees were the first revolutionary punitive units. - ed.] My mother had an office in which she interrogated 'enemies of the revolution'. She always kept a grenade on her desk in case somebody attacked her. My mother's party name was Pavlova and she had the name of Pavlova-Stravets written in her party membership card. She never changed this name.

In the first years of the Soviet power she lived with my grandfather Aron's family. Grandfather Aron was invited to lecture on construction at the Construction Institute in Dnepropetrovsk. He was paid lower rates as he didn't have a higher education, and the Institute Management never paid him full compensation for his work at the end of each fiscal year. My grandfather sued them every year, and the court always decided in his favor. During the NEP <sup>3</sup>, when students had to pay for their education, my grandfather paid for poorer students and they all paid him back upon graduation.

My grandfather wanted my mother to get a higher education and felt very critical about her involvement in revolutionary activities. He insisted that my mother entered the Medical Institute. She studied there until her first class of anatomy. She couldn't bear the sight of a human corpse and quit. In 1923 my mother met my father, and they started living together.

My father, Zakhar Voosiker [1904-1958], was born to an ordinary Jewish family. His father David Voosiker was a shoemaker; he was a very religious man. His father and his mother Sophia were born around 1875 in Dnepropetrovsk. They lived in the basement of a small apartment. My father's family was religious. My grandparents went to the synagogue and observed all Jewish traditions. However, I can't remember any celebrations in their family. They were very poor and couldn't afford any celebrations. Besides, my revolutionary mother boldly forbade my grandparents to arrange anything related to religion in our presence. They talked in Yiddish, but they spoke Russian

to their children and grandchildren. They were very enthusiastic about the revolution. They were so poor that they couldn't even dream of giving their children an education. The boys went to cheder because it was free, and the girls didn't study at all. They had four children: Gutl, born in 1900, my father Zakhar, born in 1904, Jacob, born in 1914 and Galia, born in 1915. My father's sisters and brothers were not religious and didn't observe any traditions after they had left their parents' home.

Gutl married Roman Simonian, a Persian man of Armenian origin. My Her parents were not against this marriage. They probably wanted her to marry a Jewish man, but they understood that it was their daughter's choice and they had to give in to it. Roman lived in the Soviet Union, but he had a Persian citizenship. He was a skilled shoemaker and made shoes for the party officials and their families. The Soviet authorities tried to convince him to accept the Soviet citizenship, but he refused. My father was working at the NKVD office [4](#) in Dnepropetrovsk, and his management threatened to fire him, if he didn't convince Roman to become a Soviet citizen. He managed to do so. A few days later Roman became a Soviet citizen and received a Soviet passport. He was arrested and nobody ever saw him again. Gutl didn't talk to my father for many years. She couldn't forgive him that she had lost her husband. Gutl and Roman didn't have any children, and Gutl never remarried. She died in Dnepropetrovsk in the early 1950s.

My father's younger brother Jacob entered the Faculty of Journalism at Kiev University after finishing the Rabfak [5](#). He proved to be a talented journalist. During the war he was a political officer at the front, and after the war he became a leading journalist with the Kiev newspaper Vecherniy Kiev. He married a Russian woman called Nina. Their daughter Natasha and her family live in Kiev. Jacob and Nina died in the early 1990s.

Galia married a Jewish man called Leonid Lapidus. He was a professional military. Galia finished a military college in Chernigov, and they left for his service location. He was at the front during the war. After the war Galia and Leonid lived in Chernigov, where her husband came from. They died in the early 1990s. Their daughter lives in Israel and their son lives in the US.

My father finished cheder and this happened to be his only Jewish education. My father studied at a Russian elementary school. He was a very gifted man: he wrote poems, fables, and parodies, and drew well. He got very fond of revolutionary ideas, just like many other young people from poor families did. He became a Komsomol [6](#) member, and in 1923 he became a member of the Communist Party. At that time it was popular to change first and last names to better sounding ones, and my father chose the name Vladimir Zorin. Vladimir after Lenin<sup>1</sup>, and as to his last name: he just found it beautiful.

## Growing up

My parents met at one of their party related events. My mother didn't know my father's real name until he invited her to his home and introduced her to his family. They got married at the beginning of 1924. At that time many young people merely announced themselves husband and wife and began to live as a family. That was my parents' plan, but their parents convinced them to register their marriage. A Jewish wedding was out of the question at that time. My parents celebrated their wedding with their party comrades and left for Berdiansk on one of their party assignments to organize a commune in a village. Members of this commune lived in barracks and did the farming together, hoping to harvest big crops and establish new communal relationships. They had a very

poor life and ate potatoes and sauerkraut. In the evenings they got together to sing revolutionary songs, recite poems and dream about a happy future. I was born in this commune on 18th December 1924. I was named Engelsina after Frederic Engels [7](#). Later, after the war, I changed my name to Engelina.

Shortly after I was born my mother's father Aron visited the commune. He insisted that my parents moved to Dnepropetrovsk. In the middle of January 1925 we returned to my grandfather Aron's house. My father got a job at the NKVD office, and my mother was secretary of the party unit at a factory. I stayed at home with my grandmother Matlia and my grandfather Aron. He called me 'my pet'. I was their first granddaughter - they only had grandsons before. My grandfather told me fairy tales and stories, both Russian and Jewish tales. In the morning my grandfather prayed, and I often helped him to put on his tallit and tefillin. My grandfather attended the synagogue. Once he took me to the synagogue, which made my mother very angry. She forbade him to tell me any religious stories or take me to the synagogue or speak Yiddish in my presence. .

In 1929 my brother was born. He was named Julen [Junior Leninets]. There was a portrait of Lenin over his bed and a portrait of Engels over my bed. Shortly after my brother was born my parents moved to Kharkov and then to Chernigov as directed by their party authorities.

My father was an NKVD officer, and my mother was chairman of a woman's council at the equipment yard [collective farm equipment maintenance yard]. My mother went to villages and met up with young women in order to propagate for the Soviet power and to explain to them the need to study. My mother came home late after work and often went on trips. My mother's younger sister Galia came to help my mother in the house. She lived with us for a year or two before she married Leonid Lapidus. She

In 1934 the capital of Ukraine was transferred from Kharkov to Kiev, and my father was assigned to be director of the NKVD cultural center in Kiev. We received a big three-bedroom apartment in Pechersk. [This was an elite neighborhood in Kiev where all government institutions were located and where high governmental officials lived. - ed] It was a spacious apartment, and my father's parents and his brother Jacob moved in with us. My grandparents prayed quietly in their room. It wasn't possible to follow the kashrut at that time. There was no place selling kosher food. My grandfather David and my grandmother Sophia went to the only synagogue in Podol [8](#). My parents understood their religious needs, but they didn't allow them to involve their children in any religious activities. We got along well. On Soviet holidays - anniversaries of the October Revolution [9](#) and 1st May my mother's friends visited us and we used to party. They sang revolutionary songs, Ukrainian and Russian ballads, recited poems and danced. In summer my parents went on vacation to Sochi or Yalta [popular holiday resorts in the Soviet Union] and sent us to our grandparents in Dnepropetrovsk. Our family never celebrated Jewish holidays. My mother didn't allow our grandparents to speak Yiddish to us. My parents spoke Russian, although Yiddish was their mother tongue. Sometimes my grandfather Aron visited us on my birthday. My birthday was often at the same time as Chanukkah and my grandfather gave me and my brother sweets and money. This is how I knew that we were Jews in my childhood and about Chanukkah, a Jewish holiday. My grandfather Aron died in 1937.

I went to the best Russian secondary school in Kiev in 1932. My brother went to the same school. In this school children of the party elite studied. There were Ukrainian, Russian, Jewish and Polish

children there, but we didn't segregate between children of different nationalities. We were all raised as patriots. We had no doubt that we were living in the best country of the world. There was no issue about nationality among us.

Our family faced the issue of nationality for the first time in 1936. My mother, who was deputy director of the art workers club, was offered a position as an instructor at the Party Town Committee. My mother sincerely believed that this position was too high for her and that she couldn't take it due to her lack of education. But the First Secretary of the Town Committee convinced her to accept this job, which she did. Some time passed, but she received no notification from them. She went to see the First Secretary, and he told her that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine didn't approve of her for this position because it could only be taken by a Ukrainian national. My mother was so hurt that she even cried. But neither she nor my father thought it was anti-Semitism.

In 1936 many innocent people were arrested. [10](#) My parents' friends stopped getting together. Our neighbors began to vanish. People were arrested at night. Some of my schoolmates' parents were arrested. But before this disaster swept over our family we believed that all these people were enemies of the people and that everything in our country was done in accordance with the laws of justice.

In summer 1938 my father went to the sanatorium in Zheleznovodsk to get medical treatment for his ulcer. [Zheleznovodsk is a resort in Northern Caucasus.] He went there with my brother Julen, and my mother and I went to Sochi. After a few days my mother received a telegram. My father's co-tenants informed her that my father had been arrested and that my brother was staying with them. My mother and I went to Zheleznovodsk. My mother was trying to find my father, but she was told that he had been sent to Kiev. We returned to Kiev.

My father was kept under arrest. Later he told us that he spent a few weeks in jail in Minvody, a town near Zheleznovodsk, after he had been arrested. There were many inmates in his cell. Once a little bird flew through the window and sat on my father's shoulder. One of the inmates said to my father that this was a good sign and meant that he would be free soon. My father was charged of espionage and declared either a German or a Japanese spy. Investigation officer Gorodinskiy, who defended the case, was our neighbor, but he pretended that he didn't know us when we met. The interrogation lasted for hours and hours, and Gorodinskiy was trying to make my father confess, to give him evidence of his guilt. He told my father that I had fallen ill with tuberculosis and that my mother had become a street woman [prostitute]. Of course, my father didn't believe him, but he was still nervous and worried about us. The interrogation officer hit him on his lower leg during interrogations, didn't let him sleep for days and wore him down with non-stop interrogation.

After my father was released it took months for his leg to heal. My father had a sick stomach and he felt very bad in jail. At times he felt like signing any charges brought against him in order to stop the tortures. But he thought that if he was believed to be an enemy of the people, Julen wouldn't be accepted to serve in the Soviet army when he turned 19, and that I wouldn't be able to become a Komsomol member. These thoughts stopped him from signing any charges brought against him.

Immediately after my father was arrested my mother sent me to her sister Maria, and Julen to my father's sister Gutl. She was afraid that she would be arrested, too, and that we would be sent to a



children's home for being children of enemies of the people. Soon my mother was told to move out of our three-bedroom apartment. My grandparents and my uncle Jacob moved to some relatives, and my mother stayed with some distant relatives of my father. In order to keep her stay with them a secret from their neighbors, she went there in the dark of night. She left the apartment at dawn. She didn't want these people to be accused of contact with enemies of the people.

My mother also had problems at work. There was a party meeting at her workplace at which she was supposed to be expelled from the Party. She was asked how she could live with an enemy of the people for so many years. My mother replied that she didn't believe that her husband was an enemy. He was the son of a poor shoemaker and the Soviet power had given him everything, and she didn't believe that he had betrayed his people and the Party. She put her party membership card on the desk of the secretary of their party unit. He was a very decent man, didn't submit the details of this meeting to higher authorities and kept my mother's card in his safe. When my father was released sometime soon after this meeting (he was in jail for more than four months), my mother's boss gave her the membership card back.

At the end of 1938 the Soviet authorities announced an exaggeration in the struggle against criminals, and the Chief of the State Security, Yezhov [11](#) was arrested. My father was released at that time. He was told that he had come through this test - they called his time in jail 'test' - and turned out to be a devoted communist. When my father was leaving the jail he said to the militiaman at the gate that he had no money for the tram. The militiaman gave him some change. My father went to our apartment in Pechersk. He didn't know that we had been told to move out of there. He got off in Engels Street, which went up a hill, but he was so starved and exhausted that he couldn't go up the street. Our acquaintance Colonel Lebedev was passing by. He saw my father and carried him to our house. He put him on a bench in the yard. Our neighbors saw my father and ran to him, bringing him some food. He ate a lot and suddenly felt terrible pain in his stomach. He was taken to hospital by ambulance and was diagnosed with intestinal disease. He spent a long time in hospital.

We didn't get our apartment back. We got one room in an apartment in Lenin Street. Jacob moved in with us, and my grandparents went to Dnepropetrovsk. My father was ill for a long time and didn't work. My mother hired a country girl called Ustia as a housemaid. Ustia slept on a folding bed in the corridor next to the door.

## During the war

In 1941, after I finished 9th grade, my mother sent my brother and me to our grandparents in Dnepropetrovsk. We left on 21st June. There were many young military men in the train. They were going on vacation. They enjoyed themselves, joked and sang. We arrived at our grandparents' on the morning of 22nd June 1941 [12](#). We had breakfast and went to sleep. At 12 our grandmother woke us up screaming, 'It's the war!' We listened to Molotov's [13](#) speech on the radio.

A few days later my mother and Ustia came from Kiev. Mother told us that our father had gone to the front although he was released from service in the army due to his bad health condition. But he insisted and managed to pass a medical check. My mother's sister Rachel also volunteered to the front.

In the middle of July we were all evacuated. My mother's parents joined us. My grandfather was paralyzed, so he was taken on the train on a stretcher. My grandmother Matlia went into evacuation later with some of her children. We didn't have enough food with us and were starving. When the train stopped my mother and Ustia exchanged clothes for food. Our trip lasted almost a month until we reached Kustanai in Kazakhstan [about 3,000 km from Kiev]. We rented a room there.

My grandfather's condition got worse and worse. He died in December 1941. My grandmother died at the beginning of 1942. They were both buried in the town cemetery. Ustia was a big help to us. She went to work as a cleaning woman at the theater and often brought some bread or cereal back home for us. My mother also worked, but I don't remember where she worked. We also received a food package given to us because of my father serving at the front line. I entered the Pedagogical College and studied there until February 1942. My brother attended school.

In February 1942 we moved to Cheliabinsk [Russia, 1,000 km from Kustanai], where my mother's acquaintances lived. It was a big town and easier to find a job there. My mother wanted me to study at the Pedagogical Institute. When we arrived there it was empty. There was only a cleaning woman. She told us that all students and lecturers were helping with the harvest at a collective farm. She also said that there had been no classes that year - everybody was working in the field, where they were starving. My mother and I went back home. I didn't study until March 1942 when my mother and I saw an announcement that the Kiev Medical Institute (which was in evacuation in Cheliabinsk) was admitting students. The rector of the institute, Lev Medved, admitted me without exams when he found out that I was from Kiev.

In autumn 1942 my father fell ill with tuberculosis and was released from the army. He stayed at the hospital for some time and then came to us. My father needed to live in a warmer climatic zone, and in January 1943 we moved to Frunze, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, where grandmother Matlia and Rachel's husband and son were in evacuation.

It was easier in Frunze. We had a kitchen garden where we grew potatoes. My father got a job delivering roasted geese to the town officials. He collected fat from the trays and brought it back home. We dipped bread into it and ate it with potatoes. I can still remember the bitter taste of this fat. Ustia got ox tails and we made soup with them. It was a delicious meal. My mother worked as an assistant to the Minister of Culture of Kyrgyzstan. The minister was a plain Kirghiz woman. She shared her food with my mother. They had plov [a traditional oriental meal of rice, meat and herbs]. The minister ate it with her hands [in the traditional oriental way of eating], my mother used a fork. They ate from one plate. I was transferred to the Medical Institute in Frunze and studied there until we returned to Kiev.

Kiev was liberated on 6th November 1943. We returned to Kiev in April 1944. There was a lot of snow when we came back. It was a shock to see the ruins of Kreschatik [the main street of Kiev]. [2](#). We returned to our house. During the war our neighbors from the upper floor had moved into our room. They thought lower floors were safer during air raids. We were happy to get our room back.

Grandmother Matlia, Michael and Abram returned to Dnepropetrovsk. My grandmother lived with Rachel's family. She died in 1952.

## Post-war



My mother went back to her former job at the art workers club. She was the director there until the pre-war director returned from evacuation. My mother then became an instructor. My father worked for some time until his condition aggravated. He often had to stay in the tuberculosis hospital and sanatoriums for patients with tuberculosis. He developed lung cancer and died in 1958 at the age of 54.

I went to study at the Kiev Medical Institute in 1944. There was an anti-Semitic atmosphere in Kiev at that time already. All students with Jewish last names were transferred to the Neurology Faculty, which was considered to be the least promising faculty of the institute. My last name was Zorina [which is a typical Russian surname], so I could remain at the Therapeutic Faculty - they didn't expel me.

In April 1946 I met Michael Goldentracht at a party. He was born to a family of doctors in Kiev in 1920. His father, Grigoriy Goldentracht, was a famous venereologist in Kiev and his mother, Alexandra, was a doctor, too. She graduated from the Moscow Medical Institute. They were Jewish. Michael and his sister Lialia also became doctors. Lialia became a dentist. Michael entered the Kiev Medical Institute and graduated from it during the war, when the institute was in evacuation in Fergana. In 1942, after receiving their diplomas, all graduates went to the front. Michael worked as a military doctor in hospitals.

We got married on 24th June 1946. We had a small wedding party with about 20 guests, my closest friends and relatives. After the wedding we began to live with my parents and brother. My husband was still a military doctor and I went to work at the polyclinic. In 1947 our daughter Alla was born. I quit work and stayed at home for two years.

In November 1949 my husband got a job assignment in Petropavlovsk- Kamchatskiy, Kamchatka [over 12,000 km from Kiev], and we followed him there.

In Kamchatka Michael was a junior, and, later a senior doctor at a tank regiment. I worked at the hospital. We had a room in a hostel. It only had one kitchen and one toilet for 50 families of the military. We got meals at work. Michael was the only Jew among the doctors. The Doctor's Plot [14](#) and the fight against the cosmopolites [15](#) didn't affect us. Life was too hard in this northern part of Russia, and we had too many problems to face to concern ourselves with political matters. We had red caviar and fish brought to us by fishermen. Bread was delivered once a week, and we could buy one kilo of it. We forgot the taste of butter, milk or eggs. Smaller children got half a kilo of powder milk when planes could fly to deliver it. Newspapers and magazines reached us in two to three months, and we were not aware of what was going on in the country. Only once there was a meeting at Michael's workplace to discuss and condemn the Doctor's Plot, directed against Jewish doctors. Such meetings were required to be conducted by the party leadership. During the meeting someone said that it was necessary to exterminate rats at the military unit. The commander commented, 'There, you've learned to persecute people, but can't cope with rats?'. People sympathized with my husband, knowing that he was a Jew, and accompanied him home on that evening to show their support.

I was missing my parents. At the beginning of March 1953 I went to Kiev by train. When I was boarding it, it was announced on the radio that Stalin had died. The conductor checking our tickets dropped them, burst into tears and went to her compartment. The trip to Moscow lasted two weeks, and passengers made acquaintances and friends during this time. There were a few young

soldiers going on leave on this train. They said openly that HE [Stalin] could have died before they were going on leave. They weren't in the mood to listen to the mourning music on the radio. We arrived in Moscow and could feel the horror that Muscovites were in after Stalin's funeral. Many people died in the crowds, many lost their loved ones. My parents came to meet me in Moscow. They were impatiently waiting to see me. My mother and father sincerely mourned for Stalin who remained their chief and idol until the end of their life.

At the beginning of 1954 Michael came to meet me in Kiev, and we moved to the town of Pavlovsk near Leningrad, where he got a new job assignment as a doctor in a military hospital. We lived in Pavlovsk until 1961. The head of the Soviet government, Nikita Khrushchev [16](#), declared demobilization: 1,200,000 militaries were demobilized from the army. After the war was over most of the militaries were dismissed and returned to their civil life. My husband was one of them. We returned to Kiev and lived with my mother, my brother and his wife in one room in our communal apartment. In 1961 my husband and I got two rooms in a communal apartment in the city center. After a few years we exchanged it for a two-bedroom apartment - this is the one I still live in now.

Michael was a very good surgeon. He worked at the polyclinic. He became a member of the Communist Party when he was at the front. It was necessary for his career. But he was very critical about what was happening in the Soviet Union. He wasn't afraid to speak his mind. At night he listened to the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. These broadcasts weren't allowed, and foreign radios were jammed. However, the Radio Free Europe broadcasts in German weren't jammed. My husband knew German very well and could understand the news. He shared what he had heard with his colleagues at work and with friends. He told them about medical achievements in the West and how far behind we were, etc. My husband never had an anti-Soviet attitude. He loved his country and his people. He was a good doctor and helped many people. In 1988 he fell ill with polyarthritis, which confined him to bed. He was bound to bed for eight years until he died in 1996.

I worked as a children's doctor at the polyclinic throughout all these years. I was well respected at work. My former patients still congratulate me on my birthdays and come to see me.

Our daughter Alla entered the Kiev Institute of Foreign Languages after finishing school. When she was a student she married a construction engineer, Alexandr Karelstein, a Jew. He was a leading engineer at a design institute. In 1970 Alla gave birth to Marina. My mother died shortly after Marina was born.

My brother Julen was a builder. He graduated from Kiev Engineering Construction Institute. His first wife Lida and his daughter Valeria moved to the US in 1978. In the early 1990s Julen went to Israel. I visited him in Ashdod in 1999. Julen died shortly after my visit.

My husband always spoke about Israel with respect. During the Six-Day-War [17](#) and at the height of anti-Jewish propaganda in the Soviet Union, Michael spent hours listening to the radio to hear the truth about Israel. My husband wanted us to move to Israel or the US. But I was concerned about having to start things anew and facing difficulties. We often argued, and my work was mostly the crucial factor in the end. I adored Israel when I went there. It's a truly amazing country. It's a garden on stones in a desert. I traveled a lot across the country and felt very proud of my people. I feel sorry that we didn't emigrate in the early 1970s. Now it's too late. My children want to stay here, and I'm too old to change my life.

Ukraine declared independence in 1991. People had more freedom and opportunities to improve their life. The Iron Curtain [18](#) fell, and they could travel and visit their relatives and friends abroad. I've always dreamt about traveling, and I've visited Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels and many other towns and countries lately. The economy is improving and we can buy books and products that we knew nothing about during the Soviet times. Isn't it wonderful!

Neither my brother nor I were members of the Communist Party although we grew up in a family of devoted Bolsheviks. We never celebrated Jewish holidays. Jews can speak proudly about their nation, its history and culture for the first time in many years. Only now I gradually get closer to the Jewish way of life. There is a Jewish religious community, an association of Jewish culture, the Israel Cultural Center and the Hesed in the Ukraine. I'm interested in Jewish traditions. I go to the synagogue and attend the Torah study classes. I celebrate Pesach and other big holidays. My daughter Alla works at the International Solomon University [Jewish University in Kiev, established in 1995], and my granddaughter Marina works at the Judaism Institute.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Gertzen, Alexander I (1812-1870)**

Russian revolutionary, writer and philosopher.

### **[2](#) Gorky, Maxim (1868-1936), real name**

Alexei Peshkov: Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

### **[3](#) NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by wars and revolution. After the October Revolution and the Civil War, the economy of the USSR was destroyed, so the government decided to launch a New Economic Policy (NEP). They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. But at the end of the 1920s, after a certain stabilization of these entrepreneurs, they died out due to heavy taxes.

### **[4](#) NKVD**

In 1934, the Government Political Administration (GPU) became known as the Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). Later that year the new head of the NKVD, Genrikh Yagoda, arrested Lev Kamenev, Gregory Zinoviev, Ivan Smirnov, and thirteen others and accused them of being involved with Leon Trotsky in a plot to murder Joseph Stalin and other party leaders. All of these men were found guilty and were executed on 25th August, 1936. The NKVD broke prisoners down by intense interrogation. This included the threat to arrest and execute members of the prisoner's family if they did not confess. The interrogation went on for several days and nights and eventually they became so exhausted and disoriented that they signed confessions agreeing that they had been attempting to overthrow the government. After the World War II the Communist Secret Police was renamed the Committee for State Security (KGB).

## **5 Rabfak**

Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.

## **6 Komsomol**

Communist youth organization created by the Communist Party to make sure that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.

## **7 Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895)**

Philosopher and public figure, one of the founders of Marxism and communism.

## **8 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.

## **9 October Revolution**

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

## **10 Arrests in the 1930s**

In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps affected virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the 'Great Purge'. Indeed, between 1934 and 1938, two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.

## **11 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)**

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

## **12 22nd June 1941**

On 22nd June 1941, at 5 o'clock in the morning, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.

## **13 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.

#### **14 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors of the Kremlin hospital, charging them with murdering outstanding Bolsheviks. The plot was started in 1952, but was never finished because of Stalin's death in March 1953.

#### **15 Fight against the cosmopolites**

Anti-Semitic campaign initiated by J. Stalin in the 1940s against intellectuals, teachers, doctors and scientists.

#### **16 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.

#### **17 Six-Day-War**

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on June 5th, 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

#### **18 The Iron Curtain**

In the USSR this was the term for the ban to travel abroad and communicate with foreigners or relatives living abroad. This ban existed in the USSR for over 70 years. ----- 1 Lenin (Vladimir Ulyanov, 1870-1924) - a proletarian revolutionist, organizer of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, founder of the Soviet Union