

# Jemma Grinberg

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

My name is Jemma Moiseyevna Grinberg. This is my maiden name. I have never been married. I was born in Astrakhan on 6 January 1930.

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## Family background

My father's parents died before I was born. I know very little about my father's family. My father perished when I was 11 and there was nobody left who could tell me the history of his kinship. I know that they came from the village of Radzivilovo, Ukraine, located at the border with Poland. I also know that there were a few Jewish families living in this town and that there was a synagogue. There were Poles as well as Jews living in the town. They got along well and helped each other. My grandfather, father's father Leizer (Lazar) Grinberg was born around 1870 and my grandmother was a few years younger. I don't know my grandmother's name. My grandfather died in 1914. My grandmother lived a few years longer. I know that she died before the revolution of 1917.

My grandfather Leizer Grinberg was a shoemaker. The family was not very well off. They had six children they had to provide for. My grandmother, like all Jewish women of that time, was responsible for housekeeping. According to what my father's sister Rosa told us, my grandfather's family was religious. My grandfather and grandmother went to synagogue on holidays, and kept kosher. They celebrated the Sabbath and all the Jewish holidays: Pesach, YomKippur, Hanukkah, etc., but my father doesn't remember my grandmother and grandfather praying every day or fasting at all. They didn't force their children to pray or go to synagogue either, and almost all of them grew up as atheists. The boys studied at cheder. My grandfather and grandmother spoke Yiddish and all the children knew Yiddish, Ukrainian and Polish – the languages of communication in the town. All of my grandparents' children got a primary education, and then each of them went his own way.

When their oldest son, Yevsey, who was born around 1898, finished grammar school, he did not want to follow in his father's steps to become a shoemaker. He was a very educated and intelligent boy. After grammar school he went to Simferopol to stay with distant relatives. I don't have any



information about what he was doing there. We have only a photo that he sent his mother from Simferopol in 1916 (grandfather Lazar had died before that). Like many others who came from poor families, Yevsey was enthusiastic about the October Revolution. He became a member of the Bolshevik Party and fought against the White Guards during the Civil War of 1913-1918. Yevsey's Party nickname was "Elegin," and this soon became his last name. He was an outstanding Party activist, and a high Party official. From the mid-1930s Yevsey was Head of the Belaya Tserkov Party Committee. Belaya Tserkov is a district town not far from Kiev.

Yevsey had a daughter named Stella, who was born in 1930. Yevsey's wife died in childbirth in 1935. She suffered a hemorrhage resulting in the blood infection which killed her. Yevsey sent her to the Kremlin Hospital in Moscow, but the doctors there couldn't save her. Stella stayed with some distant relative of her mother's in Moscow and Yevsey returned to Belaya Tserkov. In 1938 when the repressions against the most outstanding Party and Soviet activists was at its height, Yevsey was accused of not revealing the names of enemies of the people, which prevented their delivery to the Soviet punitive authorities. Although he was 1st secretary of the party's town committee, they didn't allow him to attend the meeting, and closed the door in his face. Yevsey, realizing that he was going to be arrested, came home and shot himself. The farewell message he wrote to his daughter Stella on a photograph in which he appeared with her, read, "Don't believe anything bad about me. Continue on the road to communism." (Editor's Note: In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.)

Despite the violence and anarchy of his time, until his last moment Yevsey remained a devoted fighter for the cause of communism.

After Yevsey's death, his sister Rosa took her niece Stella to live with her, but Rosa couldn't afford to give Stella a higher education, so Stella worked as a nurse at a kindergarten and then as a shop assistant at a bookstore. She studied English and later made good use of it when she emigrated to the USA after losing both her husband and her only son. Her husband died from a coronary infarction while at work. He was a musician and was on tour in France in the 1970s when he fell ill and died. Her son received his education at the Kiev Institute of Culture. He was also a musician, and a very talented one. He died at home from epilepsy in 1996, when he was 42.

Rosa, born in 1899, lived a very humble life. She didn't have any opportunity for education. She worked as a janitor in a hospital until she retired with a miserable pension. She was not happy in her personal life. According to what she told me, she was in love with a young man whose name was Adolf, but I don't know whether he was a Jew or a German. He disappeared in the middle of the 1920s. Rosa couldn't forget her love and didn't want to have a romantic relationship with anybody else. She lived with Stella, her daughter. Adolf found Rosa in the mid-1970s. It turned out that he had been sent abroad as an intelligence officer and had not been allowed to say "good-bye" to her. By then, he had a family and children, but he always remembered Rosa and tried to find her as soon as he had the opportunity. Adolf supported her and Stella until Rosa died in the mid-1980s.

The next child in the family was Nehama, born around 1902. Nehama was called Ania at home. She completed her studies at a medical school and worked in the nursery room at the railway station in

Kiev. Her husband, Boris Lensky (Lensky was his Party nickname), had been Yevsey's friend since the civil war. After the war he graduated from the Medical Institute and became a famous surgeon. Boris perished during WWII. Nehama and her daughter Regina were evacuated with us. After the war she returned to Kiev and lived with her daughter until her death in 1969. Regina died in 2001. Leonid, Nehama's older son, was also sent to the front during the war. The war changed his personality. He became withdrawn and lived alone.

The next sibling born into the family after my father was Leya, who was called Liza. Liza finished her studies at a pedagogical school and worked as a tutor at a hostel for laborers. She was single, but she has a daughter Tamara. Liza died in 1989 and Tamara, her daughter, now lives in Australia.

The youngest girl in the family, Fania, who was born in 1907, married Timofei Shybaev, a Russian who was the director of a big plant in Moscow. He was arrested in 1938. My father went to Moscow to meet with Vyshynsky to have Shybaev's case reviewed. Shybaev was subsequently released and the authorities apologized for their mistake, but forbade him to live in big cities. His family settled down in the village of Turbino, near Moscow, where Timofei worked as a Geography teacher at the local school. He became very nervous when he was not recruited during the first days of the war. He feared that the authorities did not believe he could be trusted to defend his Motherland. He even had a nervous breakdown. Then he was recruited into the Red Army and went through the war without one single wound. After the war he and Fania and their son Felix lived in Gorky. Fania and Timofei died in the mid-1970s.

My father Moisey Grinberg was born in 1903. After he finished his studies at cheder and then a Jewish primary school, he worked for some time in his father's shop, helping him repair shoes. In the early 1920s my father attended a trade union activist's school and for some time was involved in trade union activities. My father did not receive any special education, but he took a number of different courses and attended several workshops. He studied German and got a job as a German teacher at a school.

In 1925, my mother, Anna Deich, who, I would say, was an emancipated girl, saw a photo of my father while she was visiting his sister Rosa, her friend. Mother liked him a lot and wrote him a letter enclosing her address. They corresponded with one another through letters for a whole year before they met. Then, when they finally did meet, they fell in love with each other. In 1925 my father was arrested for some reason and was imprisoned for a few months. When he was released, my parents realized that they couldn't live without each other and got married. I mean, they just began to live together, because civil registration was considered to be a vestige of the past.

As for my mother's family, I only knew my grandmother, my mother's mother. My mother was born into the family of Shloime Deich. He had many children. My grandfather Shloime was born in 1865 in one of the Jewish towns in the province of Vinnitsa. My grandmother Rivka Leibovna Deich (maiden name Misserov) lived in Vinnitsa. After they got married my grandfather went to live with her and her family. In a few years they bought a house and my grandfather became a pharmacist. My grandfather Shloime was shot by bandits during the civil war (In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews, robbed and burnt their houses, raped women and killed children.) The Bolsheviks expropriated his pharmacy and the family had to split, in order to find work and accommodation. They moved to Kiev.

My grandmother Rivka lived with the family of her son Aron. She was very religious and, although Aron and his family didn't believe in God, they respected my grandmother's faith and created conditions that allowed her to pray, observe Jewish traditions, and celebrate holidays. I saw my grandmother only once in 1936 when the whole family got together in Kiev to celebrate her 70th birthday anniversary. We were staying with Uncle Aron's family. I remember that when it was time for my grandmother's morning prayer she was to be left alone in the room. My older sister Regina was a self-willed girl and refused to leave the room. She told me later that she saw her grandmother reading her prayer from her prayer book. During the war my grandmother and Aron's family were evacuated to Perm. When they heard that the Germans had shot the parents and relatives of Aron's wife, Riva, along with other Jews in Rostov, my grandmother stopped believing in God. She exclaimed that God wouldn't have allowed this to happen. My grandmother also did something extraordinary. She wrote a will in Yiddish and hid it in the lining of her skirt. She told her children to strictly follow her Will after her death. My grandmother died in Perm in 1943 and it turned out that she had bequeathed her body to the medical institute because she wanted to serve people in this way. Her children did not dare to disobey her, and did as she had wished. About 30 years after the war, while my cousin was on a business trip in Perm, she found employees of this institute who remembered this unique occurrence. They gave her a preserved part of grandmother's body and my cousin buried what was left of my grandmother.

My mother's brothers and sisters were atheists, too. There were six of them, just like in my father's family. All of the children obtained a basic primary education, but they read a lot and were very educated and intelligent people. Polia, born around 1890, was the oldest. Before the war Polia, her husband, Israel, and her children, David and Fira, lived in Leningrad. During the war she was evacuated to Tashkent with her daughter Fira. Her older son David, who worked in mass media in Leningrad, stayed there and survived the blockade in Leningrad. Polia and Israel died in the evacuation. Fira returned to Leningrad after the war. David and Fira died some time ago.

The next child, Maria, was born in 1892. She was called Mutia at home. Maria made hats at home. Her husband, Efim German, was a very sick man, an epileptic. During the war Maria and Efim were evacuated to Kazan. Maria died in the early 1950s. Her older son Semyon (he was called Syunia at home) graduated from the Institute and was Chief Production Engineer at a Kiev plant. During the war he was involved in the evacuation of the plant and later worked in Kazan. His younger son, Lev, graduated from Kiev University and got married before the war. After the war he and his wife were lecturers at Kiev University. Lev lectured on history and his wife Sarra Frantsevna, a Jew, taught literature. In 1949 Lev and Sara were accused of cosmopolitanism and fired. They moved to Perm. Lev defended his thesis on ancient history, and Sara defended her Ph.D. thesis on Russian literature in Perm. Lev died in 1989. Sara died some time later.

In 1895 my mother's only brother, Aron, was born. He went to cheder and that was all the education he got. But like all the other children, he studied on his own. He worked at a publishing house in Kiev without having obtained any special education in the field. During the war he was evacuated to Perm with his wife and mother. Aron died in 1978. Samuil and Naomi, his two children, became musicians. Samuil lived in Lvov for many years – he played the organ. He died in 1990. Naomi lives in Kiev.

The next child in the family was Bronia, born in 1898. Bronia worked as a clerk at a plant in Kiev – the same plant where her nephew Semyon worked. She was evacuated to Kazan with him. Bronia never married. She died in the mid-1970s.

My mother, Hana (Anna) Deich, who was born in 1900, was the first among the children to get an education at the Frebelev Institute, from which she graduated with a diploma allowing her to work with retarded children. Since childhood she had always been eager to get an education. This was not typical of Jewish girls, who were traditionally supposed to dedicate themselves to family life. In the 1920s education was free, and all children from proletariat families were admitted to educational institutions. So my mother had no problem gaining entrance into the institute and getting an education.

Her younger sister, Nelia, was born in 1904 and obtained a higher pedagogical education. She studied in Leningrad and then married Moisey Paniah, a Jew. Moisey was at the front during the war and Nelia and her sons, Victor and Alexandr, were evacuated to Kazan. Victor and Alexandr live in St.-Petersburg now. Nelia and Moisey died a long time ago.

My mother was a very progressive girl, and she “chose” a husband for herself, as she liked to joke. She was very much in love with her husband. She didn't hide her feelings and used to kiss and hug him in our presence. Only now have I come to understand how progressive her conduct was, considering that she was born into a provincial Jewish family. My father was very shy. He loved his wife dearly, but he was ashamed of her demonstrative emotions, especially when she expressed them in our presence.

## Growing up

My parents didn't have an apartment until 1936, and they moved from one place to another. At first, my mother worked at the children's home for retarded children, but as soon as she got pregnant she quit that job. My older sister Regina was born in Kiev in 1927. I was born in Astrakhan, where my mother's younger sister Nelia and her husband Moisey were living. My first memories in life date from around 1933, when I was three years old and we lived in Sestroretsk near Leningrad. My mother was director of the children's home and my father worked in Leningrad. We had a nanny. Once, when she was not around, I decided to give medical treatment to one of my dolls, and put it very close to the stove. It started to burn, and so did I. I was on fire when my nanny came in. I spent several months in the hospital. Those are some of my earliest memories.

From 1935 we lived in Anapa, in the Caucasus. My sister was very sickly, and my parents were told to move to the seashore for a year. We rented a room there. Our landlady's name was Zhuk. I faced anti-Semitism there for the first time. The grown up son of our landlady called me and my sister “zhydovki” (kikes) whenever he saw us. Once, when we came back from the cinema we found our door lock covered in excrement. My father wasn't frightened, and sued our landlady's son for hooliganism. There was no law against ethnically based abuse at that time, but still the court sentenced Zhuk to one year in prison for hooliganism and anti-Semitism. After this court case, my father decided to leave Anapa, because this guy's friends were free and might have wanted to take revenge. We went to grandmother Riva's birthday celebration in Kiev and then to the village of Voronok, in the vicinity of Moscow. My father found a job as a German teacher for students in the senior classes, and my mother worked in the junior classes at the same and only



Russian secondary village school. We received an apartment from the Department of Public Education. It was actually a 14 square meter room in a communal apartment, but we had our own dwelling for the first time. Our room was full of books. We lived there until the beginning of the war.

In 1937 I went to school. My sister was in the 3rd grade at this same school. There were Jewish children as well as children of other nationalities in my class. I remember my first teacher. She was a very nice Russian woman named Maria Vassilievna. She gave us our first lessons on internationalism. Yemelianov, my classmate, called me “zhydovka” once, and she told him to leave the classroom. Maria Vassilievna wanted to have him expelled from the school, but since this was the only school in the village, there was no other place he could go. The administration hushed up the incident, and nobody ever called me names again.

Although we knew that we were Jews, our parents tried to raise us without focusing on our ethnicity. Like any other children, we played the same games and didn't give a thought to who we were. We didn't know Yiddish, although our parents often spoke it. They didn't think it necessary to teach us Yiddish, or to tell us about the origin of the Jewish people, their history or religion. They also tried to suppress our interest in the Jewish issue, whenever we showed any. They realized that our life in the USSR would be easier if we were like everybody else. Just like any other Soviet children, we had no nationality or ethnicity. We celebrated only state holidays at home: the 1st of May, the October Revolution and the Commune of Paris days. My sister and I read a lot, attended events at literary and theatrical clubs, went in for sports, and loved volleyball. The celebration of any Jewish traditions or holidays was out of the question.

My parents weren't Party members, but they were real internationalists. When the war in Spain began and many Spanish children were taken to the Soviet Union, my mother, being so emotional, wanted to adopt a Spanish child. My sister Regina fell ill at that time and my mother regretted for many years that she couldn't adopt a Spanish child.

There was no talk about fascism in our family, although our parents and we knew about fascism in Europe. I remember seeing “The Oppengeim family” film (a German film made in the 1930s about the life and destruction of a Jewish family in fascist Germany) that we watched shortly before the war. Even after we had seen this film we tried to avoid any discussions about the negative attitudes of fascists toward the Jews. I guess, we were trying to spare one another from disturbing emotions.

## During the War

I don't remember exactly how the war began. (editor's note: On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This occurred in the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War) All I remember is that Nehama and her daughter Regina were spending that summer with us. A few weeks after the beginning of the war, the Germans started bombing the Scholkov Factory of Technical Fabrics, as this was a military facility to be destroyed. There were air raids and we taped crosses on the windows. Later, adults began to watch the roofs for firebombs. Once, our neighbor girl, Ellochka, came to tell us that there was a “little hare” in the sky. “Little hares” were German bombers. My father immediately sent us into the forest, hoping that there, we would survive the bombings. For some reason nobody thought about evacuating. We stayed in this village until the middle of October 1941. We heard rumors

about what was going on in the occupied areas, and about Babiy Yar and the extermination of innocent Jewish people (Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the Germans on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev.)

Regina was panicking more than the others, and insisted on our evacuation. Our neighbors and we put our luggage on a cart and started moving east of town. After walking about 20 kilometers, we realized that we wouldn't make it, and returned. On the 16th and 17th of October, when Moscow was in a phase of siege, an uprising occurred in our village. The factory workers captured Chanov, the Director, and Semyonov, the Technical Director, rebelling against their order to blast the factory. The workers refused, voicing their argument that if they obeyed the order to blast the factory, they would no longer have a place to work and wouldn't be able to earn money to provide for their families. This was an emergency situation and from everybody's conduct it was clear what side of the argument people took. I remember hearing our neighbor Natasha, walking with her little son Gena, saying how good it was that the Germans were coming. I don't know what happened to her during the occupation.

At the end of October my father finally took us to the Northern railway station in Moscow. Aunt Fania and her son from Turbin were already there. The railway station was so crowded that we had to wait six days until we could leave. On the 1st of October, 1941, my father had received a subpoena to appear at the recruitment office on a certain date. The night before he was to go, my mother told him to go and stay with our acquaintances in Moscow so he could get a good night's sleep. My father obeyed and went there. On that very night we managed to get on a train that was leaving. We couldn't even say "good-bye" to my father. And we never saw him again. He perished in December 1941 in the battle for Moscow.

At first, when our trip began, we were all together on the train, with Fania and her son along with Nehama and her daughter, Regina. The railcars were overcrowded, and we had to take turns sleeping. The train was heading for the Urals. On the way, it was announced that we could also go to Tashkent. My mother decided that we should go somewhere where the climate was warm as we had no warm clothing with us, so our relatives went to Perm and we went to Tashkent. Perhaps it was a mistake, because we were alone there with no one to help us. We got off the train at night. Women and children mounted horse-driven carts and the rest were told to walk beside the carts. It was pouring rain and the horses got stuck in the clay and mud and couldn't pull the carts. We were told to get off the carts and walk. I shall never forget that terrible night, with our feet sinking in the clay and uncertainty ahead of us. Afterwards, I fell ill with a fever. My mother and I stayed in a small room so I could recover. After I got better, I went to work with the adults. We worked at the cotton plantation and as payment for our work received a bowl of balanda (some sort of soup made from whatever there was at hand). There was no bread, or any food at all. We were starving. My mother fell ill with tropical malaria and there were no medications to give her.

I remember that some Uzbek men started asking to get engaged to my sister and me. They believed that at 12 and 14 we were quite ripe for marriage. We were invited to the suitors' home and we accepted the invitation in order to have something to eat. We were sitting at the table eating delicious cake, stuffing ourselves as much as we could to make the meal last longer, while contemplating with anxiety the redemption to be paid for the fiancée, if you take my meaning.

My mother told the men that she was not opposing our getting married, but had to wait until her husband came back from the war so that she could ask his permission. We found ourselves in this type of situation several times, until finally, Mother realized that we had to leave this village because the suitors came to understand that the only reason we had accepted their invitation was to be able to get a decent meal. Our relatives from Perm and Kazan sent us some money for the trip, and we left for Kazan. We had to change trains several times. My mother was told that we couldn't buy tickets in Namangan, unless she could bribe the director of the station. We wrapped money around a pile of paper, putting a bigger banknote on top, and gave this as our bribe. In exchange we received three tickets. Perhaps discovering our ruse, the director of the station notified the conductors of this, because someone wearing the railroad uniform approached us several times demanding money until Mama began shouting so that everyone would hear, "Stop demanding money from us! We already have our tickets." Then he left us alone. We had only 34 rubles left. Someone told us that we could make a profit by buying salt and then selling it, so in Kuibyshev, leaving our mother to watch the luggage - her legs were so swollen that she couldn't walk - we went to the bazaar to sell the salt. We made a little money from our sale and moved on. In Kazan my mother's sister Nelia met us and immediately sent my mother to the hospital. The doctor there said that there was nothing he could do to help mother, but Nelia started selling all the clothes she had to buy food, and managed to cure Mama.

My sister and I hardly studied at all during the war. I went to school in Kazan. My sister Regina, however, didn't waste her time. She studied at home. She always had her textbooks with her. In 1944 she went to Moscow and gained admission into the Department of Political Economy of Moscow State University.

### **After the War**

My mother worked as the director at the factory school in a small Tatar village of Amadysh not far from Kazan. After I finished the 8th grade I convinced my mother to move to Moscow. I was eager to continue my studies there. When we came to Moscow we didn't have a place to live - our house in Voronok had burned down, so for some time, we lived at the hostel with Regina. Later, Mama got a job assignment at the children's home in Repino, a village in the vicinity of Ivanovo. We didn't live there long. I went to my Aunt Fania in Gorky, and my mother went to Kiev. Mama got a position as director of the children's home in the village of Grebyonki near Kiev. I came to Kiev and went to school there in 1948. My mother and I didn't have a place to live. We rented a corner in a room and shared one bed. In 1949, twelve directors, all of them Jews, were fired, including my mother. Mama then found a job as a teacher at the kindergarten of the equipment plant.

After I graduated from school I submitted my documents to the Institute of Film Engineers. During the exams they asked me questions irrelevant to the school program, and put a "2" on my documents, a failing grade. The next year, I submitted my documents to the Silicate Institute. The admissions commission wrote "Jew" on my package in red pencil. Of course, I failed this time, too. 'Understanding the road to the Institute was closed to me, instead, I gained admission to the Geology College. This was a very difficult profession, but I was admitted. After graduating from this college I chose the Far East for my job assignment. I was looking for romantic circumstances where I could be as far away as possible from Ukraine and any problems related to everyday routines, and I wanted to see something different. At first I lived in a room that I shared with some other people.



This was during the time of the anti-Semitic “Doctors' Case,” and every evening I had to listen to what my neighbors were saying about Jews. (editor's note: Doctors' Case” - a set of accusations deliberately forged by Stalin's government and the KGB against Jewish doctors working at the Kremlin hospital, unjustly charging them with the murder of outstanding Bolsheviks. The “Case” was started in 1952, but was never concluded because Stalin died in 1953.)

They didn't know that I was a Jew. I don't know how they would have behaved if they had known. When the doctors were rehabilitated and the newspapers wrote about it, one of my roommates said, “Why reveal such a disgrace to the whole world? They should have released those people quietly so that nobody would know. They are zhydy and scumbags, anyway.” And at that moment I burst out and I told them everything I thought about the doctors' case and about anti-Semitism, that it was all a lie, and that they were mean and evil people if they could believe the propaganda rather than what they saw with their own eyes. As a result, our relationships were spoiled, though we had to continue to live together in that room for a long while.

After I had worked in the Far East for three and a half years, I returned to Kiev because my mother was not well. We didn't have a residential registration. (editor's note: Every individual in the USSR needed to have residential registration – a stamp in his or her passport with their permanent address. One couldn't find a job without such a stamp, or even travel within the country. To get such registration at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative. Besides, each tenant at an apartment needed to have at least 8 square meters of living space to be able to get registered. In this way the authorities restricted freedom of travel inside the country and kept everybody's whereabouts under control.)

We couldn't get registered in our relatives' apartments because they were not big enough. This situation continued for a long time until finally, I got registered. At that time, we did not observe any traditions or celebrate any Jewish holidays. We didn't have any opportunity to do so, and in any case, we didn't feel like having any celebrations. It seems to me now that there were no holidays at all during this period of my life.

For a long time I couldn't find a job. As soon as the bureaucratic officials in the Human Resources Department heard about my Jewish nationality, they told me that there was no vacancy and asked me to come back in a few months. Nobody had to tell me that the reason for their refusal was my nationality – no explanation was needed. I finally found a job at a laboratory in one of Kiev's plants. After I worked there for three years, I decided to enter the Polytechnic Institute. I had lengthy work experience and normally, should have had privileges. However, my boss didn't want to issue a recommendation letter for me to the higher educational institution. But this was after the 20th Party Congress, and we Jews were not so humble any more and were starting to stick up for ourselves. (At the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had been happening in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.)

I addressed the issue of the letter of recommendation to the director of the plant and called the conduct of my boss anti-Semitic. The director gave instructions to have a letter of recommendation issued for me. However, I never gained admission to the institute – they told me that my work experience was insufficient, though it was over three years long. I didn't try to enter the Institute another time. I worked at the plant until I retired from the position of Senior Production Engineer.

I had no personal life. Mama and I shared one room and a bed for many years. I couldn't even think of meeting a man and falling in love. I dedicated my life to working and to taking care of my mother. There wasn't much good in my life. My only holidays were my mother's and my relatives' birthdays. We sometimes went to the theater, but we spent most of our time in front of the TV, or reading. We didn't have enough space to invite guests, and we were not invited either. We received an apartment in 1974. My mother died in 1982. During the last years of her life Mamma wanted to move to Israel – she wanted us to go there. We got all the information we could about Israel from the mass media. I'm still sorry that I didn't have enough courage to leave. And considering my miserable income, I can't even dream of taking a trip to Israel.

My sister Regina is single, too. She lives alone in an apartment in Ivanovo. After she graduated from Moscow State University (the most prestigious higher educational institution in the former USSR) she grew fond of the theater and cinema and took a course for theatrical producers led by the famous producer of the Taganka Theater Lubimov. Regina founded a public theater in Ivanovo that became famous all over the Soviet Union. Great poets like Okudjava, Voznesensky, and Evtushenko came to visit her. A famous dissident poet, Alexandr Galich, and Vladimir Vysotsky were her friends. Now Regina is lonely and ill. Hessed supports her.

Only in recent years I have tried to celebrate Jewish holidays, read Jewish newspapers, or take part in the life of the Jewish community. I regret that I've come to identify myself as a Jew so late in life. However, I think that such is the common destiny of my generation.