

Roza Levenberg

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Kiev

Ukraine

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My name is Rosa Yevseyevna Levenberg I was born in Uman (formerly in Kiev region, now - Cherkassy Region) on March 21, 1920.



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My family history

My mother, Mariam Moiseyevna Levenberg (nee Berdichevskaya), was born near Uman in the village of Buzovka. This village got its name from the word “buzok,” which means “lilac” in Ukrainian. The village was very beautiful, all immersed in lilac bushes. There was a windmill and a pond in the village. My mother’s father, my grandfather Moishe Berdichevskiy, rented the pond and the windmills. I don’t know when or where my grandfather was born. I know that the family lived well, due to the pond and the windmills. They raised fish in the pond and earned a decent income from that. The man who leased the pond to them lived in St. Petersburg and my grandfather went there at the end of each year to submit his financial reports.

My grandmother Reizl Berdichevskaya was born in about 1862. I don’t know her maiden name. She was an orphan and married my grandfather at 16. She had seven or eight children -- I don’t know how many exactly, but only four of them survived. She died from a heart attack when she was 36 or 37. There were four children left – my mother and her three sisters.

The oldest sister was named Inda. She was much older than my mother. She was born around 1880. She married an accountant at the Nesterovskiy sugar factory and moved to the town of Zhashkov where he lived. They didn’t have children for a long time, and then they had two daughters and a son. Inda was widowed very early. Her husband came home for lunch one day and went into the bedroom to take a look at their son. He didn’t come back for some time. When Inda went to call him, she found him dead. Inda was left with three children – her daughters Rosa and Fania and son Boris. They had a difficult life. To enable his sisters to have an education, Boris worked as hammerer, but he was injured and died in hospital. Rosa and Fania became teachers. During the war they were in the evacuation, and after the war they worked in Moldova. They died a long time ago.

My mother’s second sister’s name was Dina. She was born in 1888. She married an ordinary Jewish

man named Boris Cherniak. He came from a poor family, and so my grandparents at first did not give their consent to this marriage. But Dina and Boris loved each other so much that her parents finally relented and they got married. They had four children – three sons and one daughter. Two of the sons died when they were young and the youngest, Solomon, went to the front during the Great Patriotic War [World War II]. He died in 1942. Dina and Rosa were in the evacuation and then they lived in Kiev. Dina died in 1970.

Mamma's third sister, Hanna, was born in 1890. She made a marriage of convenience with a much older man named Leonid Shteyn. When they got married he was supervisor at a landlord's estate. After the Revolution he worked as a night guard. [He died in 1935.] Hanna had one son. He was on the front during World War II. He returned from the front with tuberculosis and died soon thereafter. Hanna died not long after he did.

After grandmother Reizl's death, grandfather lived alone for a long time. He got married a second time when Inda, the oldest daughter, was already married. Grandfather's second wife's name was Mariam. She was much younger than he was. They had seven children: daughters Vera, Dobrish, Fania and Shyfra and sons Naum, Misha, and Yona. They all studied in high schools and then in institutes of higher education.

Vera was the oldest of these children. During the civil war when the family lived in Uman, she worked in an orphanage. Once armed bandits came there. Vera stood in the doorway and did not let them in. She told them there were children in the building. Later she studied and worked as teacher in a Jewish school and then in an ordinary school. She died in Kiev at the age of 82.

Dobrish studied at Kiev University, which was called INO at that time – the Institute of Public Education. She graduated in mathematics, and later she got a correspondence degree in literature. She was married for some time to Ezra Fininberg, a Jewish writer, but they got divorced. Dobrish didn't have any children. She is no longer living.

Shyfra never got married. She also graduated from an Institute in Kiev. She lived with us while she was studying, and we were great friends. She is the only one of the children still living. She is 96 now and lives in Moscow. She worked at a design institute until she was 92. She was a skilled specialist, and they sent a car every day to take her to work.

After Shyfra came Fania. She had a very hard life. She studied at the Moscow Construction Institute. Before the war their whole class was sent to build earthworks in the vicinity of Belostok. When the war started and the Germans came to Belostok, she and her two friends found themselves in occupied territory. One of the girls was Russian, and the other was a Jew who pretended she was Georgian. Fania didn't quite look like a Jew. They somehow got in touch with partisans, who forged them new documents. Fania became a Russian – Irina Vassilievna. They rented apartment together but a neighbor of theirs didn't like something and reported on them. They were all taken to prison. They were interrogated and beaten. The Germans wanted them to disclose the partisans' secret addresses, but the girls kept silent. They were sent to Germany. Fania spent three years in work camps. When Germany was liberated, the Americans tried to talk them into leaving for America. But they were Komsomol members, and they only wanted to get

home! In Germany Fania fell in love with a young man from Odessa, and they actually became husband and wife. After they came back, though, they were processed in filtration camps. They were separated and never met again. She searched for him but she couldn't find him and she never heard anything more about his fate.

Fania returned to Moscow where her sisters and brothers had been living. In Moscow she entered the same institute where she had studied before the war. She could barely finish it. She was often summoned to the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs). They interrogated her, trying to figure how, being a Jew, she could have survived. Later, she worked at a design institute, but for many years she couldn't get a promotion because she had been in occupied territory during the war. Fania never got married and suffered from being separated from the man that she had loved so much. In the middle of the 1980s, doctors discovered that she had cancer. It was too late for any treatment, and she died.

The brothers Naum, Misha and Yona all graduated from the construction institute in Moscow. They were outstanding engineers. Naum was even awarded the Order of Lenin for the construction of a building in Moscow. This was a remarkable event, especially for a Jew. During the war they were not allowed to go to the front, as they were working for the defense industry in the rear in Cheliabinsk. After the war they worked in Moscow. They all died from cancer at a young age.

My mother Mariam Berdichevskaya was born in 1891. She was actually raised by her stepmother, as grandmother Reizl had died young. Mariam, grandfather's second wife, tried to give her children an education – they all studied in the small town of Teplikovo near Uman. Stepmother Mariam kept saying that all the children were equally dear to her, but she provided an education only for her own children. My mother wanted to study; she was very smart. But her stepmother said that this was to be decided by her father. And her father, my grandfather, kept joking that he wouldn't be able to get sufficient dowry for all his educated daughters.

My mother told me that grandfather's family was religious. They celebrated all the holidays and followed all the rules. Every Saturday one of the children used to take some food and money to poor Jews to help them celebrate the Shabbath.

My father Ovsei Tsalevich Levenberg was a tutor in my mother's family. He was born in 1889, and his Jewish name was Shyka. .

His parents – grandfather Tsale and grandmother Gitl – lived in Kiev, where they owned a café. It was mainly my grandmother who worked there. Grandfather wasn't very fond of working. He was a very interesting man, he liked to walk around and he took good care of himself. He came from a family with many children – he had seven brothers and sisters, but I didn't know them. My grandmother also came from a family with many children. They said she was a distant relative of [the famous Yiddish writer] Sholom Aleichem. Grandfather Tsale and his brothers were very religious. They celebrated all the Jewish holidays and went to the synagogue. They had all the religious accessories – tfilin, tallises.

My father also observed Jewish traditions strictly when he was young. He was the only son in his family. I don't know how it happened, but my father left his family rather early. He lived an

independent life and received no support from his parents.

He tried to go to high school, but he failed. He didn't want to serve in the Tsarist army so he somehow ended up with my mother's parents in Buzovka. He was hiding there from being drafted and became a tutor for their daughters. My mother and father fell in love, but they had to wait ten years before they could get married; they were engaged for ten years. My father finished high school by passing his exams without attending classes, and my mother stopped her studies.

Later mother's family moved to Uman, and there my parents got married. During the civil war there were pogroms against the Jews, but our family stayed safe. Their Russian and Ukrainian friends hid them. My mother was the only one of the family who could walk around town. She didn't look like a typical Jew; she had long plaits and wore a Ukrainian skirt and an embroidered Ukrainian blouse. She went out into the town whenever they needed something.

Growing up

At the time I was born in Uman in 1920, my father worked as accountant and my mother was a housewife.

We lived in Dvortsovaya street in two rented rooms. Mamma was often ill, she had a weak heart, so we had a housemaid, a Ukrainian girl. I remember she once took me to the Orthodox Church near our house. When mamma found out she told her off and forbade her to take me to church.

At home we celebrated Jewish holidays – we always had matzo for Pesach. Father didn't go to the synagogue, though – he wasn't as religious as Grandfather Tsale.

After Grandmother Gitl died, in about 1923, Grandfather Tsale moved to Uman to join us. Now mamma tried to follow all the rules on holidays. If we wanted to eat something that was against the rules we did it in the kitchen and kept it a secret from grandfather.

I remember well how they celebrated the holidays at Aunt Dina's place. She also lived in Uman. My aunt had special kosher dishes. We didn't -- perhaps it was because father didn't earn much at first, and we couldn't afford things. Aunt Hanna also lived in Uman and her family also celebrated the holidays. I remember gomentashy (hamentashen) – little pies stuffed with poppy seeds made for the Jewish holiday Purim. I liked them very much. But in my childhood nobody told me about the history of Purim, so I didn't know any of the stories about the origin of gomentashy. I don't remember Sabbath at home. I can say that my parents celebrated holidays out of habit and tradition, but they were not religious.

We had a Jewish family for neighbors, and their daughter and I were friends. That is all I remember about Uman. We moved to Kiev in 1925. My father got a job at a firm there, and we settled down in Pushkinskaya street. An acquaintance from Uman lived there in a three room apartment. At that time they started restricting living standards, and the authorities took away one of his rooms. He wanted to keep the second room so he put our family in it.

The four of us shared one big room. Grandfather Tsale lived with us. He was a big help to mamma, as she had a series of heart attacks. Grandfather and father often argued over politics. Grandfather

was religious, and he didn't like the new political system. Ad my father, of course, stood up for everything new.

Grandfather prayed when we were living in Kiev, but he didn't go to the synagogue. Then he fell seriously ill. Mamma took as good care of him as she would have of her own father. She was with him when he died in 1940 - some time before the war.

Going to school

In 1928 I started school. I went to a Russian school, the first model school in town. We had excellent teachers. Our teacher Anna Panteleimonovna Snezhko was the first honored teacher in Kiev. She taught Russian literature. I wanted to follow in her footsteps. She taught very well and made things interesting. My schoolmates were not ordinary kids. Why? The capital of Ukraine was moved from Kharkov to Kiev, and all the more or less important Soviet and Party activists moved to Kiev and received apartments in the center of the city where we lived as well. So their children came to our school. They were nice kids. They were far from being arrogant. They made friends with us ordinary children. They never played it up that they were children of important people. The son of People's Commissar Postyshev, the son of acting People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Petrovskiy, the daughter of Deputy People's Commissar of Public Education Makogn, the daughter of Regional Prosecutor Torgovets - they all studied with us. Later, their parents were jailed and these children became orphans. In our class almost all the children were Jews. Ukrainians and Jews treated each other well. My best friend was Ukrainian. There was a funny situation once. The class monitor was putting together a list of students, and she had to put down their nationality for some reason. She asked all the children what their nationality was. It came to a boy who wasn't Jewish, and he said: "Everyone else on the list is Jewish. Put me down as a Jew."

I was an Octobrist, then I became a pioneer, then I turned into a fanatic Komsomol member. We had a Komsomol group, and we would get together at someone's home on Sunday to study the Communist Manifesto.

Very often we would meet at Zoya Torgovet's place; she was the daughter of the local Prosecutor. In the late thirties her father was transferred to Moscow. He was arrested in 1937 and shot. The authorities tried to get us to have Zoya expelled from the Komsomol. Not one single person voted for it, so the leadership of the Komsomol district committee had her expelled during our vacations. They also took away her apartment and gave her a little room instead. Her neighbors tormented her - they didn't allow her to come into the house. But she managed to finish school with excellent grades and went to Moscow to enter the Moscow Literature Institute. There she wasn't accepted, however, as she was daughter of an "enemy of the people." During the war Zoya went to the front as a volunteer and was a machine gunner on the front line. She was wounded and her hand was permanently disabled. After the war she came back to Moscow and completed her studies in the journalism department at the University. She died in the late nineties.

Leonid, the son of People's Commissar Postyshev, was in our class. After his father was arrested and executed in 1939, he went to pilot school. His older brother was also arrested and executed in

1939, and his younger brother was convicted in a criminal case and sent to a prison camp, where he lost his mind. Leonid was eager to get to the front line. He was summoned to the SMERSH (Counter-Intelligence Division), and they asked him: "Why do you want to go to the front? You can be captured by the Germans." He said he would never surrender. "But why are you so eager? They don't want you at the front, why are you so eager to get there?" But he was brought up in a different way. He couldn't help saying: "And I can't understand why you, so big and healthy, sit here rather than going to the front." That did it. He was sent to a prison camp. And he always got years added to his sentence. When [Nikita] Khrushchev came to power [after Stalin's death in 1953] he recalled that Postyshev had had children and ordered that they be found. They found Lyonia, set him free, and gave him an apartment in Moscow where he lives to this day.

A very interesting Jewish boy named Lyolia Movshovich also a very interesting Jewish guy was in our class. He came to Kiev from France and never said anything about himself. They didn't want to admit him into Komsomol, because his father was in France. Then they received a telephone call from somewhere... and Lyolia was admitted. His father turned out to be our Intelligence officer in France. Lyolia Movshovich died during the war.

Our teachers were of different nationalities. They treated us very well, regardless of our nationality or the social position of our parents. The principal was Baikina, a Jew, she was also persecuted in the late thirties. She spent many years in prison camps and was liberated after Stalin's death.

As I already said, I was an active Komsomol member. At school we organized parties dedicated to the Soviet holidays - May 1, and the anniversary of the October Revolution. We also had a singing and dancing group. We all enjoyed performances where we sang joyful Soviet songs. And we never gave a thought to why people all around us were arrested and disappeared. It was not proper to talk about it at that time -- and to think about it was terrifying.

At home we also celebrated the Soviet holidays. While grandfather was alive (he died in 1940) we always had matzo for Pesach, but otherwise we didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home.

In 1938 I finished school and entered Kiev State University. That was when I faced explicit anti-Semitism. I wrote a very good composition for the written part of the entrance exam. I made no mistakes. But everything was crossed out with red pencil, and I just received a satisfactory grade. At the oral exam, the examiner was an honest woman. She advised me to address the Rector and request that a commission review the way my written exam was graded. I did so. This commission reviewed my composition and gave it a good grade, and I was admitted to the University. Sill, I was admitted to the three year course, instead of the five year course.

During the War

On the morning of June 22, 1941, at the start of the war, mamma woke us up. I asked her to let me sleep a little longer, as I was to have an exam that day. I thought we were just having an ordinary training alarm. But mamma said firmly: "This is not a training alarm. It is war." She knew it, though there had been no announcement on the radio yet. When I went to take my exam that morning they didn't seem to know anything about the war in the University, either, though the exam was

being given in the basement, as Kiev was being bombed. I came in and told everyone that Molotov had spoken on the radio announcing the perfidious attack of the fascists on our country. Everybody got very upset. Our young lecturer Bronstein left for the front that very day.

The Germans advanced rapidly, but we were told that our army would not leave Kiev. Solomon, the son of mamma's younger sister, was in charge of the armed forces crossing the Dnipro. On July 7, Solomon called and told us to leave immediately, because he could already see gunfire near Kiev. He told us to be ready in two hours and a car would pick us up to take us to the pier to catch the last boat. A train was out of the question at that time. We took only the most necessary things and left. The Germans were kept away from Kiev for some time, but we left on July 7, because they were so close.

Mamma and Dad and I, mother's sister Hanna and her husband, Solomon's wife and their children and Rosa and her son, all fled together. Solomon's wife also took her younger sister. We all went to Stalingrad. We went down the Dnipro to Dnepropetrovsk on the boat. That was where the first raid happened. Our boat was on the river because there was no place to moor. When the bombardment started they put planks across to the bank, and we all ran down and hid in shelters dug on the bank. Then we were put into open railcars with no roof, and we didn't know where we were going. It was a long trip, because the track was broken and the train driver couldn't find the way. Still, we managed to reach Stalingrad, where we stayed until August 22, 1942.

In Stalingrad I worked in a shop at the tank plant. I was an active Komsomol member, so later I was transferred to the Komsomol bureau at the plant. This was the equivalent of a Komsomol district committee, because it was such a big plant. When the raids started and the Germans neared Stalingrad, I stayed at the plant all the time. People caught a few hours of sleep where they could, and then went to back to work.

While we were in Stalingrad my mother fell seriously ill – she had breast cancer. She had surgery and stayed in hospital for a whole month. We couldn't leave without her, and the Germans were actually in town by then. I got a phone call from the district committee. They told me that the last train was leaving and I had to go. We had just got on this train when a terrible bombardment started and the crossing was destroyed. We had to get out on our own. Men started making rafts. There was terrible panic. The Volga was on fire, people were trying to clutch at the barges; they fell into the water, drowned and couldn't help each other. It was a terrible sight. Dad went to make rafts with other men and took our suitcases with him. Then he came back to pick up mamma and me. But when we got to the Volga it turned out that our raft had already left – and with it our possessions. Somehow we got across the river on a boat. They usually bombed at dawn and we had to hide under the trees. I remember lying under a tree that was hit by a splinter of a bomb.

We went on and had to cross the Akhtuba River. Someone took us across on a boat. We crossed the river and saw a bus on the bank. We already knew about the extermination of the Jews and mobile gas chambers, and this bus looked like a mobile gas chamber to us. We heard a shot and shouts in Russian. We decided that they were Germans and that we were in the occupied area. I promptly tore up my Komsomol membership card, threw it into the river and then jumped into the river myself. I couldn't swim and decided to drown myself. But in the water I felt someone grabbing

me. I turned back and saw my mamma. She said to me: “What are you doing? Did you think about me?” At that moment we saw a military unit. I ran to them. They were in uniforms and their commanding officer didn’t speak Russian well. I couldn’t believe they were the national army. He found a Jew in his unit who spoke Yiddish to me. I only believed then that they were our soldiers. We hadn’t seen bread or any other food for three days. The soldiers gave us some food and proceeded on their way to Stalingrad. We went on – we walked and then rode some horses and eventually came to Leninsk, a district center. We were starving. I saw a storage facility where soldiers were loading tomatoes into boxes. I came by and stretched out my hand to them. I said nothing. A soldier looked at me and asked “Where?” He gave me a skirtful of tomatoes and I took these tomatoes to my mamma.

We received our evacuation papers, they put us on a train, and we went on. We went to Frunze, the capital of Kirghizia because all our relatives were there. They had left Stalingrad long before us.

When we arrived in Frunze, all our relatives were living in a big room in a village house with a dirt floor. They all worked on the construction of the Voroshylovskaya hydropower station. Solomon’s wife was a cashier in the canteen. She brought us noodles, and this was what we ate. When we entered the house I saw a big pot with cold noodles in it. I started eating it, saying not a word to anyone. My aunts were standing around me crying. We stayed with them. I worked as telephone operator, but I could only work at night because we didn’t have any clothes. At night my aunts dressed me in all clothes they had, as nights were cold there. I was the only one of us to work. My father was ill by then. The Commissar of the construction site was Jewish, and he found out that I was a Jew when he looked through my papers. He asked me to work as his assistant manager. I told him that I couldn’t work during the day, as I didn’t have any clothes. He said they would find me something, and they gave me a jacket, a skirt and a shawl. So I started working there. Life became easier, as I was paid more and I could have meals at the canteen for non-manual laborers.

In 1943 mamma insisted that I go to Kzyl-Orda, where my University had been transferred. I only realized much later on that mamma was very ill and didn’t want me there when she died.

I got to Kzyl-Orda on November 7. There was a celebration for the liberation of Kiev. We danced and enjoyed ourselves. As for me, I danced a little and then, all of a sudden, I felt unwell. I didn’t know what was the matter – but, at that very moment, my mother was dying. I didn’t know anything; the family didn’t want to let me know. Mamma was afraid that I would quit the Institute and would have no education. Three months later, I went to Frunze and only then learned that mamma had died. I went to Kzyl-Orda with my Dad to go back to Kiev together. But I was not allowed to take him to Kiev. He stayed in Kzyl-Orda, and I went back to Kiev along with the University. We went back on a freight train in closed rail cars. They only opened them at some stations for us to go to the toilet and wash ourselves. It was a long trip – over three weeks.

We arrived on May 8, 1944. There was another raid that day, as the Germans continued their air raids in Kiev for a while. They put us in some hostel with no lights, water or sewerage. Our apartment in Pushkinskaya street was occupied by other people. I went to court to get the apartment back, and it took me three years to do so.

After the War

I studied in the University until 1945. During this time I had a problem with one lecturer who had stayed in Kiev during the occupation. He and a monitor attended my teaching test. Before mine, they had monitored another teaching test by a Russian student. Later, during the review of these tests, this lecturer attributed all my successful points to that Russian girl and all her faults – to me. He gave her an excellent mark. As for me, he couldn't make up his mind. Then I told him that this was wrong, and that he was treating me unfairly because I was a Jew. Some time later he was expelled from the University. It turned out that he had collaborated with the fascists during the occupation.

After graduation from the University I got a job as Dean of the Faculty at the Pedagogical Institute. My father returned from evacuation with his second wife. He lived at her place and I rented a room with neighbors. After we got electricity in our apartment, the owner was very concerned about energy saving. It took quite awhile to prepare for my lectures, so my neighbors suggested that I prepare my classes in the kitchen. [To save energy in the rest of the house; the kitchen would be warmer.]

I wanted to become a Party member, and the former Rector of our University gave me a recommendation letter. But I had to go through the district committee, and when I applied there they refused to admit me. They told me I was not supposed to have left Stalingrad – I was to have stayed and helped our army. This was nonsense, but, still, they didn't admit me into the Party.

In the early fifties, at the time of the campaign against «cosmopolitans» and the "Doctors' Plot",¹ I was fired. The reason they gave was "staff reduction", although there was no reduction. It took me almost a year to find a job. My father helped me a great deal during this period. Jews could hardly get work then, especially as teachers. An acquaintance of mine helped me to find a job at an evening school. She hired me when she was substituting for her boss who was on vacation. If he had been there, I wouldn't have got a job. I worked at that school until I retired.

My personal life was not easy. I had known Iosiph Yankevich before the war. He was a Jew and came from an ordinary family that was poor but generous. His parents were very good, working class people. They always lived in Kiev. His father worked at a factory, and his mother was a housewife. They were not religious, but they celebrated the holidays. When we met, they were already very old, but they always tried to help us. Iosiph was a worker and later was promoted to work for the Komsomol League. When I was at school he was the full-time secretary of our Komsomol organization. I had liked him even then, but there could be nothing between us as I was just a schoolgirl and he was 10 years older. During the war the authorities wanted Iosiph to stay in Kiev and do underground work. But he went into the army.

Iosiph was the first person I met after I returned from evacuation. He was a translator; he translated Russian and foreign classical writers into Ukrainian. He was director of the Publishing House "Molod" ("Youth"). I helped him with this work, and we published collections of our translations. I fell in love with him, but we were just friends for quite a while. Iosiph was married at the time and had a son, and I couldn't even think about anything but friendship between us. But still.... Iosiph fell in love with me, too, and we lived in a common law marriage for 10 years. His wife died from cancer, and I helped them and took care of her during her illness. When we were

going to get married officially, Iosiph suddenly died from heart attack, and I was left alone. For many years I couldn't even think of getting married again, because I loved him so.

I met my second husband at a resort in Pheodosia when I was 60 and already retired. He was a Jew – Mark Mikhailovich Ostrovskiy – a very kind and intelligent man. I had a very good 12 years with him, but all my life I loved Iosiph. Mark died and I have lived alone since then. All my relatives died before the war – my grandmother and both grandfathers. My father, Ovsei Levenberg, died in 1958. Mamma's sisters died, too. Only Shyfra is still alive; she is 96 now. She lives in Moscow and sometimes I talk with her on the phone.

Alexandr Marcus, the grandson of mamma's sister Inda, lives in Israel. He is a famous mathematician. He couldn't defend his doctoral thesis when the Soviets were in power because he was a Jew, but a theorem was given his name at that time. For many years he couldn't get permission to immigrate to Israel. Finally they left ten years ago. He had invitation from Haifa University and from Beer Sheva University. When they arrived at Beer Sheva they saw a poster that said "Welcome, Professor Marcus!". He is published all over the world and now he lectures in America. My only other relatives are Svetlana and Valeriy, Solomon's children (he died during the war). Svetlana is 63 and Valeriy is 65. They are very good to me and they help me.

I have no children.

Iosiph Dinkevich's son often calls and comes to see me. He remembers how much I loved his father and he treats me well. We go to the cemetery to Iosiph's grave together. But the daughter of Mark, my second husband, left for Israel after his death and didn't even say "Good-bye" to me. Mark and I never wanted to emigrate and that was one of the reasons why she hated me openly.

I never was in Israel, though I certainly would like very much to see that country. I don't think I ever will, though. To go there you need money and health, and unfortunately I don't have either.

I have been an atheist all my life. I can't call myself a believer but I try to observe the Jewish traditions whenever I can. I celebrate Pesach – I always have matzo, and I fast on Yom Kippur. I also celebrate Hanukkah and Purim. Hesed, the Jewish center, has supported this a lot, helping older Jewish people to regain the kind of Jewish way of life that they couldn't afford during the Soviet regime. Hesed provides assistance, and it feels good to get support at this difficult time. I receive Jewish newspapers published in Kiev, and I am very happy about the Jewish communities, cultural centers, and Jewish children's and young people's organizations existing now in Kiev. It's a pity that we didn't have any of these earlier.

Thank you for listening to the story of my life.