

Nina Khlevner

St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Bella Shevchuk

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Nina Lvovna is an intelligent woman of 78. She is not tall and has kind eyes.

Five months ago she buried her husband and was left completely alone.

In spite of all the bitterness, connected with the loss of her husband, with whom she lived for 40 years, she expressed her desire to tell us about the life of her relatives.

Nina Lvovna perfectly remembers many details of her ancestors' life and is very proud of them.

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• Family background

I was born in 1924 in Rogachyov, a small town in Gomel region [today Belarus]. I don't know if there was a maternity hospital in Rogachyov, but I was born at home, on Grandmother's bed.

I remember Rogachyov as a very beautiful town on the bank of the Dnepr River. Many Jews lived there. I didn't notice any anti-Semitism then. I think even more Jews lived there than Russians. The Dnepr was very beautiful, lilies bloomed on the shoals. There was a beach at the opposite bank of the Dnepr. It was possible to get there in a ferryboat. A big bridge could be seen in the distance. The bridge was of strategic significance during the war -I read about it in the newspapers.

My maternal ancestors came from this town. My grandfather, my great-grandfather and all their relatives lived there. Their last name was Goldin. My great-grandfather was a tailor. All men in their family were tailors. I cannot say exactly what the residents of the town in general were engaged in, I can only tell you about my relatives. They were craftsmen. Grandfather's sister married a carter, but all other men in the family were mostly tailors. There must have been traders in the town too. There was a good marketplace and a lot of berries were sold there. Grandmother went to the marketplace; I have not been there.

Grandfather never told me anything about their childhood. I only know that he had two brothers who left for America, but I don't know their names. Two other brothers left for Leningrad [today St.



Petersburg]. The Germans executed Grandfather's sister Kreina with her family in Rogachyov by shooting in 1941.

Grandfather's name was Meilakh Goldin and Grandmother's name was Seina-Chaya; I do not know her maiden name. I don't know anything about her family, only that she had a sister. My grandmother perished in Lugansk [today Ukraine], where she was also executed by shooting by the Germans in 1941 or 1942. Grandmother was a stocking-maker.

When the Great Patriotic War [1](#) broke out, Grandfather was about 63 and Grandmother was 60, though I am not sure about it. They had six children: sons Afroim, Pavel and Semyon and daughters Serafima, Rosalia and Revekka. Afroim and Pavel were at the frontline and fought against the Germans. Afroim was awarded many orders. Pavel reached Vienna. Serafima was executed by shooting by the Germans in Rogachyov.

In the 1970s Afroim and Rosalia left for Israel, where they died later on. Semyon, Pavel and Revekka lived in Leningrad. They have also passed away by now.

Grandfather was a tailor and Grandmother was a stocking-maker. Grandmother was involved in this craft while the children were small. When they grew up, Grandfather began to make more money. He worked at first at the cooperative and later on as an independent handicraftsman. His health did not allow him to work at the cooperative any longer and the children also helped at home. Grandfather had never had an atelier of his own or hired employees. His customers were mostly Jews. Grandmother stopped working and kept the household. They spoke Yiddish. Grandfather could not even write in Russian. He had no beard, but he had a moustache. My grandparents dressed very well, as Grandfather was a very good tailor.

They had a house in the main district of the town, not far from downtown and the bank of the Dnepr. There was one big room in the house and from that room an entrance led to two small bedrooms without doors. Beside these rooms, there was an isolated room for guests, a kitchen with a Russian stove [2](#), a small corridor, and a very big covered verandah. The furniture was good. I remember a fine black leather sofa, a nice black couch, a wardrobe, Grandfather's desk, where he worked and a sideboard. It was all in the dining room. In my grandparents' bedroom there was a bed and a chest of drawers; the other bedroom had a small bed and a small table. There were no paintings, books or bookshelves in the house.

I know that they kept a cow and chickens. When I visited them before the Great Patriotic War, there was no cow anymore. As far as I remember, they kept the cow until 1936, but their children began to object. Keeping a cow required too much effort, so it was sold. They always had hens. There was a small garden and a vegetable garden. They had no helpers in the household, but before the Great Patriotic War they were less engaged with it, as the children began to help.

Grandfather observed absolutely all Jewish traditions. Grandmother also did it, but a little bit under Grandfather's pressure. They had a kosher kitchen. They observed Sabbath and Grandfather attended the synagogue on Fridays. When he returned, he put on his tallit and read prayers. We sat at the table and waited. We could start eating only after he had finished the prayer. Grandmother also attended the synagogue, but not regularly. A non-Jewish woman came on Friday night and turned on the light, an oil lamp under a lamp-shade.

They celebrated all Jewish holidays at home. They had, for instance, Pesach dishes, which were kept separately. Grandfather read the Haggadah on Pesach. I remember some holiday, I cannot say which one, when a small glass is poured and the door is opened; everybody waits for someone to walk in and drink. [Editor's note: The interviewee is talking about Pesach, about the glass for Prophet Elijah]. All in all, Grandfather celebrated all religious holidays, as he was very religious. However, he did not teach us Hebrew and basics of Judaism, as it did not comply with the time and official ideology [3](#).

On certain days a beggar man came to our house. They fed him. It was traditional to help poor families. Days when that man was given food were scheduled as agreed with the Jewish neighbors. One day he came to eat at one house, next day he went to a different house, then to another one.

My parents and distant relatives, who were numerous in Rogachyov, as well as our friends said about my grandparents that they were very kind people and everybody respected them very much. Even strangers spoke of them with respect. Their relations with their relatives and neighbors were also very good.

My grandparents never went anywhere for a vacation. They only visited their children. Between 1926 and 1929 they lived in Lugansk [today Ukraine]. It was the period of starvation [4](#) and very difficult to get food in Rogachyov. Food products were delivered to industrial towns at higher rates. They left for Lugansk in Ukraine together with several families and lived there for three years. Later they came back.

My grandparents both perished in Rogachyov in 1941. Their daughter Serafima came for a visit from Leningrad with her little daughter Zinaida right before the war. Her elder daughter Ninel stayed in Leningrad. When the war broke out, Serafima and her daughter were allowed to return to Leningrad. She did not dare leave her parents alone. Normal evacuation was organized from Rogachyov. We even knew the person, who put them on the train. Little Zinaida fell sick en route. I still keep a postcard with a message about her illness. They got off the train in order to find a doctor. Grandfather's sister Kreina also got off the train together with her family. They couldn't get back onto the train after that.

They hired a cart and tried to make their way farther away from the Germans. The Germans approached very quickly and they were all sent back to Rogachyov. I don't know how long they stayed in their house. The Germans collected all Jews and executed them by shooting. The witnesses said that Grandfather got out of the pit. His wife, daughter and granddaughter were shot in front of his eyes. At night he got out, went to someone whom he trusted and told him everything. Grandfather understood that he could not go to Leningrad. He said that he had a son in Lugansk and he wanted to go there. No one saw him ever after. Maybe that man betrayed him. There is a different house now in the place where the house of my grandparents was. It is the same house, with the same facade, but no one has the right to claim the house, because it has been reconstructed already.

My paternal grandfather's name was Meyer Khlevner. He also came from Rogachyov. Everybody called him Meyer-the-water-carrier, because he delivered water in a barrel. At first he was a rope maker, he weaved ropes. Fires often occurred in Rogachyov. The houses were wooden and the wood dried during summer. If one house started to burn, a lot of houses caught fire and burnt down. Grandfather Meyer once lost a house in the fire. And his rope business also burnt down. He

was a very proud man. He had very rich cousins and they wanted him to ask them for help in order to restore his business. He said that he didn't want to ask them for help. So they bought him a horse and a barrel, so that he could deliver water from the Dnepr. Water was delivered like that to houses at that time. Only in the 1930s the water supply system was constructed and water-pumps were placed in the yards.

People in Rogachyov said that Meyer was too proud. When he arrived and saw that there was no container prepared for water, he poured the water out and left. That is why everybody considered him an evil man, though my father told me that Grandfather was a very kind, but independent man. People wanted him to wait for the containers to be brought and the money to be paid. But he did not like to wait and plead. That is why he was humiliatingly called Meyer-the-water-carrier. He died before the Revolution [5](#), I don't know exactly which year.

Grandmother Nikhama came from a rich family. Her parents were against her marriage with Meyer. They also considered him an evil man. Grandmother didn't keep in touch with her parents, brothers or sisters. Nikhama and Meyer had two sons, my father Lev and Mordukh; and two daughters, Chesya and Basya. Nikhama was sick most of the time, I believe there was something the matter with her heart. She died in 1924 before my parents got married. I don't know anything about her childhood, youth or her family.

My father, Lev Mironovich Khlevner, was born in Rogachyov in 1902. His parents were poor, that is why he worked at a brick factory since he was nine years old. Later he was enlisted into the army. After the active service he studied at various Party courses and worked at high managing positions.

Father's relatives were not religious people. Their destiny was different. He had two sisters in Dnepropetrovsk. Chesya lived there with her husband; they were confectioners. In 1941 they decided to stay home and considered the talks about German atrocities stupid. They were executed by shooting by the Germans, but no one knows the details. The husband of Father's second sister Basya was subject to repressions in the 1930s [6](#); it was in the newspapers. When he was released, a car hit him. Maybe it was not an accident. They had three children. Their elder daughter Rosa worked as a hospital nurse. Her daughter Anna was fifteen and her son Boris was seventeen when they volunteered to the frontline without their mother's permission and disappeared. No one knows anything about them. Basya got evacuated and survived.

Father's brother Mordukh lived in Rogachyov and worked in a store, selling salt and kerosene. He had five children and a sick wife. The family was evacuated in 1941, I don't know where. His wife died there. One of his sons, Fadey, was a worker, he lives in Israel now. His other son Samuil joined the army and perished at the frontline during the Great Patriotic War. Son Semyon was also in the war and returned disabled. He lives in America now. The fourth son Mark worked as a construction designer. He died of a stroke. Uncle Mordukh's daughter Nina died too; she had hypertension.

My mother's name was Rosalia Mikhailovna Khlevner, nee Goldina. She was born in Rogachyov in 1903. She attended a Jewish school and finished six grades. She knew Yiddish and wrote in Yiddish, but she had to speak Russian all her life. Before the Great Patriotic War she was a housewife, raising her children.

My parents lived in a small town and knew each other since their childhood. Mother was very beautiful and was a success among men, she attracted men's attention. Even a rich nepman

[entrepreneur during the NEP] [7](#) courted her. Father tried to attract my mother's attention. And he did. They got married in 1924. There was a wedding ceremony; I have seen the album with wedding pictures. They had a wedding according to the Jewish tradition, with a chuppah. Later my parents added other pictures to the album. It was a very beautiful album with a memorable inscription for the wedding. I had seen it before World War II, but it disappeared after the war.

I was born in Rogachyov in 1924. Mother raised me at home; I didn't go to the kindergarten. My childhood was not bad at all. Mother read books to me, taught me and took me for walks. I didn't go to school in Rogachyov, because we left the town in 1926. I only went there to visit my grandparents.

Our family's social and financial status was rather good. Father was a member of the Party and a Soviet organization man. He was appointed manager of economic enterprises and political instructor, although not a very important one. Father was often 'thrown' from one place of work to another. We lived in different towns in Ukraine: in Lugansk, Belovodsk, Slavyansk, Shepetovka and Kramatorsk. Father held important positions: Raypotrepbsoyuz [8](#) chairman in Belovodsk, head of the resort purchase department in Slavyansk, army political employee in Shepetovka, second secretary for the Party District Committee of the VKP (b) - All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks - in Kramatorsk. He was provided with separate apartments at every place he worked. We lived in good conditions.

My parents' life was far from being religious. They lived in modern urban conditions. No Jewish traditions were celebrated in our family. We did not attend the synagogue. I think that there even was no synagogue in the places we lived. There was a Soviet school. Father gave me various 'ideological' lectures about life, about how I should behave. My favorite holidays were the Soviet New Year and the Soviet Army Day [9](#). We never celebrated Pesach or other religious holidays. Only once, in 1940 I was present at the Pesach celebration at my grandmother's place in Rogachyov. I didn't like the Pesach food, I had to eat matzah and matzah dumplings instead of bread, and I was not used to it.

I don't remember anything about life in Lugansk, where in 1927 my sister Mira was born, but she died at a very young age, when she was one and a half years old. She had a whooping cough and brain fever. I remembered only my first trip on the train. I was four and a half years old. Father was assigned to political courses in Odessa [today Ukraine] for half a year. He took us with him.

We lived in Belovodsk at the beginning of the 1930s, where Father was sent to work for three years after he finished some regular Party courses. Father was appointed chairman of the district consumer cooperation, provided supplies to the inhabitants. There was a stud farm there. We often went to the horse races, went to the countryside. My parents took me everywhere with them. My brother Vladimir was born in Belovodsk in 1932.

At that time the Soviet power was introducing the policy of agricultural collectivization [10](#) and dispossession of the kulaks [11](#). It was a terrible time. The villagers starved, and people's dead bodies lay about in the street in the towns. The authorities began to look for scapegoats. Father, being the only Jew among the managers, found himself under investigation. In 1932 he was arrested and thrown into prison. He was accused of bad supply of food to citizens and organization of starvation, though the superior managers, who ruined the peasantry, should have been held accountable for that. Mother sent me to the militia head. He allowed us to see Father in prison.

There was a wooden table and two benches in the meeting-room. I ran to Father. The guard was silent and turned away to the window. Father asked me not to touch him, but I tried to kiss him. In half a year the investigation was over. Father was declared innocent and released. I was eight years old.

I went to school at the age of seven in Belovodsk. It was a standard Soviet school with all studies in Russian. I changed schools very often because we moved frequently. After Belovodsk I went to school in Slavyansk up to the seventh grade, later in Rogachyov for half a year, then again in Slavyansk until 1939 and finally in Shepetovka. My favorite subjects at school were Chemistry and Literature. I was very often the favorite pupil among the teachers.

Only once I met a teacher with whom I could not have good relations. It was our teacher of Geography and our class teacher. Maybe she couldn't cope with the fact that I was a Jewess. She liked to make the following inquiry, 'Hold up your hands those who are Russian. Those who are Ukrainian. Those who are Jewish.' She was a hidden anti-Semite. There was no public anti-Semitism, but such a procedure involuntarily made one reflect. She very often made this experiment. She was interested in the national content. Everybody understood that neither Russians nor Ukrainians roused special emotions. A Jew does rouse such emotions. Everybody turns around to see who is a Jew. It led to national discord between children. I myself felt uneasy. I had a very bad attitude towards that teacher, and so did she to me. We hated each other.

I didn't have private teachers. My friends were both Russians and Jews. We didn't really feel the difference as we considered ourselves Soviet above all. I loved to read, especially historic and adventurous novels. Once I was in a summer pioneer camp [12](#) and twice in a sanatorium [resort] in Slavyansk. But I spent most of the time with my parents. I joined the Komsomol [13](#) during the Great Patriotic War absolutely sincerely, because of my convictions.

• Before and during the war

In 1938 Hitler demanded the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia to be handed over to Germany [14](#). Father, being a staff officer, was again enlisted into the army as a political official [this was the name of commissars at that time]. Father was mobilized right after the terrible repression against the main Army Officers, when the Army was 'decapitated' and the Army was under restructuring, new staff was employed. The Red Army was getting prepared to help Czechoslovakia. I remember the forces being loaded onto troop trains. However, Poland refused to let the 'Reds' through and England and France yielded to Hitler.

In 1939 Mother moved to Rogachyov with me and my brother. The Soviet-Finnish war [15](#) broke out at that time. Father, as a military, was at the frontline. Mother decided to go to her parents' place in order not to be alone during this restless time. When in spring 1940 the war with the Finns was over, Mother left with my brother to join Father. I was left with my grandparents to finish the school year. Studies could not be interrupted more than twice during one year. There were difficulties with food supplies in Rogachyov at that time. Bread was given based on rations [16](#), only black bread. If printed cotton was delivered to the store, women formed a line several days beforehand.

The approach of a great war was felt. Fortunately, there was a voentorg [a store for military people and their families]. Mother left me a voentorg card [a document, which provided the right to shop

in that store]. As a fifteen-year-old girl I went shopping in this expensive voentorg store, which was located far from our house. Grandmother asked me to buy fish. I even brought bread. Bread was distributed there not according to ration cards, but according to the ration itself. I could take a whole loaf of bread in that voentorg, which I brought home and gave to Grandmother. Rather often it was a pretty big and heavy package of food products altogether, so carrying it, I would drop fish or something else.

My parents and my brother moved to Shepetovka [today Ukraine, 250 km west of Kiev] in 1940. I joined them after finishing the eighth grade of school in Rogachyov. We lived in the military settlement. Our garrison was located at the former frontier of the USSR, which, after the annexation of Western Ukraine in September 1939 [17](#), was shifted to the west. There were 30 four-story brick buildings in the town, where soldiers and military families lived. There was a voentorg and a standard store, a movie-theater, the Red Army House for public and cultural performances.

Shepetovka itself was a small old town, where a lot of Jews lived. Even Russians and Ukrainians, who lived there, sometimes spoke Yiddish. There was a good school, where I studied up to the ninth grade with other children of the military. Father was provided with an official apartment with furniture. We had two rooms and good furniture. The house was heated with coal. But I don't remember any water supply system. It was installed later. We had no animals, and no vegetable garden. We had a lot of books, all secular. Father read political literature and Mother liked novels. We subscribed to many newspapers and Mother attended the library. Father did too, but seldom, as he was a busy man.

In 1941 there was a parade in our town on 1st May. Me and my friend watched it from the balcony. It was very interesting to watch the people we knew, marching. We were 16 years old at that time, I already had a passport. On our way back home we discussed with childlike enthusiasm the strength and military bearing of our army. We met a drunk neighbor of ours; he liked young girls very much. He heard us talking about the large number of military forces at the parade and said, 'why, you know that half of the forces stayed in the barracks today?' The army expected Germany's attack on 1st May. I remember that. Later Father told me, 'Do not tell anyone about it. It is a secret.'

Right before the Great Patriotic War my father was demobilized from the army and appointed to work at an important position in the town of Kramatorsk [today Ukraine 550 km south-east of Kiev]. Huge heavy-machinery plants, producing military products, were located there. Soon heavy rains started. Our house was flooded, the whole first floor. We rented a room temporarily in a private house with a landlady.

Soon after that, on 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War broke out. Father went to the military registration and enlistment office and wrote an application, asking to be accepted to the army as a volunteer. Father immediately left for the frontline. We received letters from him for about three months. The last letter from him stamped 'Pereslavl' [a small town near Kiev] was dated 28th September 1941. Later we got no messages from him. I continued to write letters, until my postcard was returned with a piece of paper attached, which said that there existed no such military unit. He was missing. We don't know what happened with him. Later we got an official notification, stating that he was reported missing in October 1941. Apparently, he perished in encirclement [Germans surrounded and destroyed five Russian armies near Kiev in September

1941. The Red Army lost 1 million persons altogether then, killed and imprisoned].

In the fall of 1941 the Germans advanced to the east quickly. Me, my mother and brother left for evacuation. We had no luggage - no personal belongings, no towels, no food. There was no organized evacuation from Kramatorsk. We were evacuated according to the voenkomat [military commissariat] as a military's family. We were sent to Sverdlovsk in the Urals [2,000 km east of St. Petersburg]. There were no more passenger trains, bombed troop trains returned from the frontline without any schedule. We got onto those semi-destroyed trains and left without any destination point.

Soon we came to Stalingrad. German planes hovered above us and bombed the trains in front of us, but they did not bomb our train. We were robbed in the train, a basket full of food products was stolen. So we had to starve. At the Tikhoretskaya station we slept right on the station floor. We arrived in Stalingrad lousy and starving. We were sent to the evacuation station for sanitary treatment. We washed, but that did not help, we still were lice-ridden. We were offered to be evacuated to Yenataisk, to get across the Volga River, to its left bank. Mother refused. She still believed that Father, reported missing, had not perished and would look for us in Sverdlovsk according to the voenkomat papers. If we had gone to Yenataisk, we would have stayed there, because it was possible to get there only on board a ship.

In 1941 we arrived in Sverdlovsk [now Yekaterinburg, a big center of military industry in the Urals]. We were sent to the village of Zaikovo from there. We lived in a small wooden house without any facilities. Neither me, nor my brother Vladimir went to school during the first year. My brother was small and I had to work at the kolkhoz [18](#). We dug the soil, planted potatoes and did some auxiliary works. In 1941 I joined the Komsomol. I went to the village school only in the third year and finished the ninth and tenth grades.

In 1944 we returned to Kramatorsk. The town was heavily destroyed, we had nothing left, the Germans took everything, even the children's bicycle. There was a table and empty cases left in the room. We sat on these cases. Big geographical maps remained, which were made of cloth. We washed them and used them as bed sheets. Such was our return home. Mother had already reconciled herself to the thought that Father had perished and would never come back. We had to start life all over again.

• Later life

Anti-Semitism became very strong after the war [19](#). Especially in everyday life, it was horrible. Besides, we came to Kramatorsk only before the war and we were not considered 'belonging to that place.' When we saw that our neighbors had some of our things and asked them to give them back to us, a militia man immediately appeared before us to warn us. We received some anti-Semitic leaflets, faced dirty anti-Semitic attacks. We barely managed to escape from that place. Mother found a job as a barmaid at the movie-theater and was provided with an official apartment by the trade organization. Some nice people gave us an iron bed and a small table. We lived like that. The voenkomat provided us with a vegetable garden of 15 by 1000 meters unfortunately we could do nothing with that land, we had no strength. My brother went to school.

Out of many educational institutions only a machine construction technical school opened in Kramatorsk. I entered that school and was assigned to work [20](#) at the Novokramatorsky machine-construction plant and worked there until 1956 in the position of a technologist. My mother and brother left for Leningrad in 1949, where all her relatives lived. I could not join her before I worked for the term, fixed for me as a young specialist, assigned to a certain place of work. It was not possible to leave a place of work on one's own desire. In 1956 I wrote an application to the Machine-Construction Ministry and I was allowed to leave. After that I left for Leningrad.

I had to find a job in Leningrad. Since I worked at the Novokramatorsky machine-construction plant, I didn't need any additional advertising. Everybody knew that enterprise. But when any staff department saw my passport and read that I was a Jewess [21](#), everything became too complicated. I experienced several unpleasant episodes trying to find a job. At one of the enterprises the staff department head agreed to accept me, but, having seen my passport, told me, 'You will not be taken on.' At the 'Svetlana' plant the staff department told me directly that the General Manager would not take me on because of my nationality. The staff department at the third enterprise, where I came according to their job ad, accepted me, but the General Manager rejected me.

I found a job with difficulty at the SKB – Special Construction Design Bureau, which designed weighing measurement devices, but it was shut down in 1960. Between 1961 and 1964 I worked at the SKB which designed heating devices for the 'Lenteplopribor' plant. When I married my direct supervisor, I decided to quit, in order to prevent any rumors. I began to work at 'Krasnogvardeyets' plant, which produced medical devices. I worked there until I retired.

I didn't really face any anti-Semitism at work. There were no conflicts based on national grounds in our team. I am not a conflict person and I never sought any promotion. I cannot say that I was refused to be promoted because of my Jewish identity. I am not a person who wanted to build a career. I never intended to become a member of the Communist Party. Once I was elected member of the trade-union bureau and that was the peak of my social activity.

In 1963 I got married. My husband was a Latvian. My husband's nationality was not important to me; it was the personality that mattered. We met at work, we worked together, he was my supervisor. His name was Konstantin Andreyevich Gek. He was born in 1908 in Leningrad. It was called Petersburg at that time. About his parents I knew that they were very good people. I never saw his father, he perished during the siege of Leningrad [22](#) in December 1942. But his mother was a very nice person.

We didn't celebrate any Jewish or Latvian holidays, only family holidays and Soviet ones. We celebrated our birthdays, the New Year, but not the Jewish one, the 8th of March – International Women's Day – and the 1st of May – International Solidarity of Workers, which became national holidays in the USSR.

In 1928 my husband finished one course at the Academy of Arts and after that got transferred to the Military-Mechanical Institute.

In 1932 he graduated from that Institute and was assigned to work at the torpedo plant launching at Kaspiysk plant [23](#). He was subject to repression there in 1937. I read his investigation file, but I still didn't understand, why he was put in jail.

In 1939 his mother solicited for him and was received by Popkov, the Chairman of the Leningrad Municipal Executive Committee, Popkov. After that the case was reviewed. It was concluded that no item was confirmed and that he had not been working for the Japanese intelligence. However, someone underlined his nationality 'Latvian' in the file, wrote 'three years' and circled it in red pencil. He was sentenced to five years.

In 1942 he was supposed to be released. But during the war Stalin signed a decree, which prohibited the release of any convicts until 1946. So he was held in Kargopol camps [Archangelsk region in the north of the European part of Russia, 600 km north-east of St. Petersburg] until 1946 and then stayed in exile until 1953. When N. S. Khrushchev [24](#) came to power, his conviction was lifted in 1953 and in 1956 he was rehabilitated [25](#). He spent sixteen years in Gulag [26](#) all in all.

He was placed with criminals, whom the camp heads respected more than political prisoners. Fortunately, my husband was a sportsman in his youth: he did boxing, track and field athletics and could defend himself. He made them respect him. He worked at the timber throw and rafting. Convicts were accompanied by armed guards with dogs to their work places.

My husband fell sick with scurvy because of hunger. His teeth fell out and his legs got swollen. One criminal felt sorry for him and brought some paper to draw cards for additional food products. However, food didn't help anymore. The convicts did a 'mostyrka' for him, an artificial blood poisoning: they pricked his finger with a rusty nail and poured some kerosene into the wound. His hand got inflamed and he was placed into the sick-quarters, where convicts/doctors saved his hand.

He got acquainted with an ex-tanker at the hospital, who told him about tanks. My husband made up a device, improving the equipment of the tank and submitted the invention to the head of the camp. After release from the hospital he was provided with a separate room, two assistants/convicts and the management started to use him as an engineer. Besides, he drew posters and demonstration drawings of weapons, used for guards' training.

In 1953 my husband returned to Leningrad, and worked as a technologist at various enterprises. The General Manager of the hoisting-transportation plant, where he worked before 1956, was among the plant employees in Kaspiysk, who put him into prison. My husband had to quit and leave for Latvia, where he grew and sold vegetables. In 1957 he returned to Leningrad. When we met, he was Deputy General Manager of the design bureau of the 'Lenteplopribor' plant. He retired from this position in 1980.

When we got married in 1963, we were very happy and had a wonderful time together. We didn't have children, because we were both not young people anymore. During the first two years we spent our vacations in the south, on the Black Sea coast. Later we went fishing and mushroom-picking every year. We devoted all our vacations and holidays to those activities. We took a tent and spent the night in the woods or on the bank of a river. We bought ourselves a one-room apartment in the city and made a neat home out of it for us.

In 1980 my husband retired and began to paint landscapes and take them to the art salon to be sold. He painted until he was 90 years old, until his death.

My mother and brother Vladimir emigrated to Israel in 1976. Mother died there in 1980. My brother moved to the USA after Mother had died and we lost contact since 1982. I don't know, why I didn't emigrate together with them, I regret it very much. Certainly my husband would have gone with me. I could not trust the Soviet system, because I knew the truth about it from my husband, who spent sixteen years in Gulag. I remember my friends, who left for Israel. I wanted to leave too, but I was scared for some reason. I don't know why, but I was afraid that it would be bad there.

The Arab-Israeli wars [27](#) [28](#) and the severance of diplomatic relations between Israel and the USSR [29](#) did not touch me personally. Not even after my relatives left for Israel. Certainly I was very worried about the Jewish state and I wanted it to exist.

I have never been to Israel. I corresponded with my mother, when she was already living there. I wrote letters to her every five days. I wrote on the 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th and 30th day of each month. She knew the dates, when to expect my letters. When I wrote to my mother, I thought every word over [30](#) and gave the letter to my husband to check. We knew that the letters were examined by the KGB. Mother replied in a more free style to me, told me about her life and invited me to come.

I would like to go there now, but I am too weak to do it, and most importantly, I cannot afford it. When the democratization started in this country in 1989 we believed that everything would change for the better and we believed in truth, but it appeared that it does not exist. My life has changed a lot. We lived like normal people and then we turned into poor ones. How does it help, that I have the legal right to visit my mother's grave, if I have no money to make the trip?

I get parcels, medications and gifts on holidays from Hesed [31](#). I am very grateful for this support. I felt my belonging to the Jewish nation only when I grew rather old. It means a lot to me, maybe mostly after my dear husband died in 2002 and I was left all alone. Only some friends of mine are alive, some of them are Jews, some non-Jewish. All the rest died.

- **Glossary:**

[1](#) Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war.

By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

[2](#) Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

3 Struggle against religion

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

4 Famine in Ukraine: In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

5 Russian Revolution of 1917

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

6 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

7 NEP

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

8 Raypotrebsoyuz

District Consumer Committee, the organization, which provided supplies to the inhabitants.

9 Soviet Army Day

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

10 Collectivization in the USSR

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

11 Kulaks

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

12 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

13 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

14 Sudetenland

Highly industrialized north-west frontier region that was transferred from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the new state of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Together with the land a German-speaking minority of 3 million people was annexed, which became a constant source of tension both between the states of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and within Czechoslovakia. In 1935 a Nazi-type party, the Sudeten German Party financed by the German government, was set up. Following the Munich Agreement in 1938 German troops occupied the Sudetenland. In 1945 Czechoslovakia regained the territory and pogroms started against the German and Hungarian minority. The Potsdam Agreement authorized Czechoslovakia to expel the entire German and

Hungarian minority from the country.

15 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannenheimer line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannenheimer line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

16 Card system

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

17 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

18 Kolkhoz

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

19 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained

ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans.'

20 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

21 Item 5

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

22 Blockade of Leningrad

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

23 Kaspiysk Bombing

2002 Kaspiysk bombing was a May 9, 2002, attack which ripped through the military parade to commemorate the 57th anniversary of Soviet victory in World War II on Lenin Street in the city of Kaspiysk, Dagestan. Forty four people, including at least 19 soldiers and 12 children, were killed and 133 wounded in the explosion. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaspiysk_bombing)

24 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.

25 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

26 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

27 Six-Day-War

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

28 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

29 Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel

After the 1967 Six-Day-War, the Soviet Union cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, under the pretext of Israel being the aggressor and the neighboring Arab states the victims of Israeli imperialism. The Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) conformed to the verdict of the Kremlin and followed the Soviet example. Diplomatic relations between Israel and the ex-Communist countries resumed after the fall of communism.

30 Keep in touch with relatives abroad

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge

him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

31 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint, Hesed helps Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.