

# Sofia Furman

St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer: Sofia Shifrina

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*Sofia Ayzikovna Furman is a very amiable, agreeable person without any pomp.*

*My general impression from our meeting was very light and joyful, though we talked about hard and even tragic times in her family life.*

*Her neat, light and sunny apartment, where she lives alone, adds to this pleasant impression.*

*Her son often visits her.*

*Sofia Furman was prepared for our meeting very seriously - she had written down all dates, names and events, which had any relation to the history of her family - in order to miss or forget nothing. Her librarian background was evident.*

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- **My family background**

My name is Sofia Furman; I was born on 21st June 1935 in Leningrad [today St. Petersburg], into the family of a professional soldier, though my parents came from Belarus.

My father's father, Mendel Zalmanovich Furman, was born probably at the beginning of the 1870s and lived in Belarus. From 1931-1935 my grandfather worked in the 'Komintern' kolkhoz [1](#) as an accountant. I don't know exactly when he was born, and he died during the siege of Leningrad in 1942 [2](#). Since 1934 he lived in Leningrad, on Vassilyevsky Island and being already elderly, he depended upon his children. He had four children: sons Ayzik - my father - Efim and Mikhail and the younger daughter Bassyia, who was adopted by my maternal grandfather's family. Mendel settled on Vassilyevsky Island, one of the oldest Petersburg districts, a big island in the mouth of the Neva River; in the 1920s-1930s there was a sort of a 'Jewish center' of the city.



I remember Grandfather's apartment on Vassilyevsky Island. Grandfather Mendel had only one big room in that apartment, but it was always full of people. Grandfather, my father Ayzik and his brother Efim lived in it. When my parents got married, they lived in that room too for some time. I also lived there for the first two years of my life [1935-1937]. Since I was very small, I remember that room only sketchily. There was a big wooden plank bed to the left of the entrance, on which one slept at night and sat at daytime. I always played on it. There was either a stove or a fireplace behind the bed. There was also a table and a wardrobe and no other furniture. Right opposite the entrance there was a huge window. I also remember that the ceiling in the room was very high. Beside Grandfather's room there were two or three other rooms in that apartment, where the families of our neighbors lived [3](#). All doors to the rooms led to a wide but not long corridor. Our door was the first to the left in the corridor. The common kitchen was to the right of the entrance to the apartment. Recently my son Mikhail visited that apartment. He said that it had changed a lot after modernization.

Ayzik Mendelevich Furman, my father, was born in 1909 in Belarus. Until 1929 he lived in the village of Verkudy in Belarus [40 km north of Lepel, Vitebsk region – at present it doesn't exist], two years he studied at a Jewish school, later he lived for a while in the village of Ulla – he worked there in a fishing cooperative association. His younger brother Mikhail worked there too, he also perished in Belarus during the war. In the 1930s my father came to Leningrad. In October 1931 he was drafted into the army. He kept studying all the time, finished military signalmen courses in the army and was involved in political studies based on the politprosvet [4](#) system. As a result Father stayed in the army as a staff officer and a signalman and was in command of a special communication company. He even mastered parachute jumping and participated in demonstrations of parachute jumping. He was one of the first who was parachuting over our city.

As a professional soldier he served in Osinovaya Roscha [suburb of Leningrad] in a signal battalion. He was a political adviser to the battalion commander, participated in the war with Finland [5](#) and was awarded the order of [the Combat] Red Banner [6](#) for this military campaign, I have a photo of him with it. He perished in 1941 – approximately in September – his last letter was dated from August 1941. He was killed at the front, in the battle of Leningrad.

The second son of my grandfather Mendel was Efim Furman, born in 1893. At the end of the 1920s he came to Leningrad, worked at the 'Hydraulics' factory, he graduated from an institute and before the war worked in Estonia [7](#). At the beginning of the war [8](#), during evacuation of ships from Tallinn, their ship was taken down, and Efim perished, but there was no official information about his death. I only know that he was married, his wife most probably also died in the war, and they had no children. I have a photograph showing Efim together with his friends.

The person in the center of the photo – our countryman visited my aunts Ghita and Zita after the end of the war – he was a member of the initiative group, which collected money for the monument [later it was erected in Kamyen on the grave of Jews executed by shooting]. All his family was also shot there. And I remember him very well; I only don't remember his name and surname. He went through the war and after it he wanted very much to immortalize the memory of the murdered Jews, notwithstanding the general attitude to Jews that time. And he succeeded: at present this monument stands on the place of execution.

My father's mother, my grandmother, married Mendel Zalmanovich, gave birth to four children and died, when the youngest child was one-and-a-half years old. She died in 1915, and unfortunately I don't know her name. All her sons - three of them - perished during the war, including my daddy, and the youngest child - the girl [Bassya Furman] survived the war.

Grandfather Mendel had no other women in his family and he didn't remarry, so he gave Bassya to the family of his wife's brother - my mother's father. In that family there were many girls and Bassya was brought up with them, they considered her to be their daughter [it was the family of Avraham Shukhman]. Bassya got married before the war. When Bassya Furman got married, she changed her surname to Vassilevskaya - she was the wife of Uncle Mikhail Vassilevsky. Uncle Mikhail survived the war; he visited us after the end of the war. He died approximately ten years ago.

And when the war broke out and Germans attacked the territory of Belarus, Bassya managed to escape. Together with her children - two sons and a daughter - she ran away right before the Germans came, and they reached Gorky region. We were also evacuated there. After liberation of Belarus, she went back and worked in Vitebsk district as a teacher at an elementary school. She gave birth to five children - three sons: Valery, Vladimir and Viktor and two daughters: Larissa and Svetlana; they all are alive to date. Her daughters followed in their mother's footsteps and became teachers.

Her elder daughter Larissa was born in 1937. She lives in Minsk [today capital of Belarus] now and we are great friends. She married a former army officer. Larissa worked as a teacher of biology all her life. Now, as a pensioner, she continues to work and took a job in a company which sells oriental herbs. She has two children, Oksana and Andrey, who also have children already. Oksana is a manager at a plant. As far as I know, she has a son. Andrey served in the army and now works as a communication engineer.

Svetlana started to work as a teacher at an elementary school and later continued as a teacher of biology in a boarding school for children sick with tuberculosis - near Vitebsk, in a village called Bolshiye Lettsy. They still live there. Svetlana's husband is also a teacher, he teaches history at the same boarding school.

The younger son, Viktor, worked at the 'Hydraulics' factory as an engineer, later he finished a pilot school, served in Transbaikalia [Russian Far East], and retired on a pension in the rank of colonel. All children of Bassya Vassilevskaya live in Belarus.

My mother's father, Avraham Shukhman, was born in 1876, and on 17th September 1941 in the shtetl of Kamyen [Vitebsk region, Lepel district] Fascists shot all the Jewish population including my grandfather. Now on this place there is a monument in honor of 177 Jews shot by the Germans. They said that my grandfather had a large house, he was a partisans' messenger during the war and they used his house as a safe house. The Germans arrested him and tortured him terribly. They said, the Germans had torn out hair from his long beard and then shot him. He didn't leave the village before the occupation as Bassya did - probably he was too old by that time.

Before World War II my grandfather was an excellent shoemaker. I know that he worked in a co-operative and he was doing well. He had many [seven] children. They kept chickens, four cows and geese too. Every child had his own responsibility: one took care of the cows, the other took care of

the geese and turkeys. There were no assistants except for the children. The elder children helped to bring up the small ones. Avraham's wife [Mikhlya Shukhman] died during the intervention, during the Polish invasion. [In April 1920 Poland entered the war against Soviet Russia.

In 1921 according to peace negotiations in Riga, Poland received a significant part of Ukraine and Belarus. The final event of the war was a defeat of the interventionists.] I don't know the year of her birth, and neither do my cousins. She died in 1919 of typhus. My mom told me that she cried a lot, but nobody could help her. They were hiding from Poles and from intervention. At that time Germans and Poles came there in turns. All of them plundered their place, and nobody could help.

My grandmother died, when my mom was nine years old, and her younger brother was six. My mom was the next to last child in my grandfather's family. My grandparents spoke only Yiddish. Grandmother Mikhlya was the last person in our family who spoke only Yiddish, all the rest knew Russian. Grandfather didn't get married for a second time: he loved his children very much and devoted his life to them.

### • Growing up

My grandfather Avraham Shukhman was very religious. I remember 21st June 1941 – it was my birthday – I was born in 1935, hence in 1941 I was going to be six years old – it was Saturday. And all our relatives gathered at our place to celebrate my birthday on Sunday, the 22nd of June 1941 – the day when the war broke out. All our relatives came. At that time we lived in Osinovaya Roscha [suburb of St. Petersburg], my daddy served there in a military camp. My two grandfathers came too.

One of them – Avraham – underwent surgery a short time before; I remember very distinctly that his hand and shoulder were bandaged. I remember him eating. My mom prepared kosher food especially for him: staying in hospital, he didn't eat hospital meals, his daughters brought him food especially. Mom told me that in Belarus [Kamyen shtetl] there was a synagogue near his house, and my grandfather used to be a synagogue warden. On holidays he invited everybody to visit his place – it means that they were rather well-to-do, because he had a lot of children and everyone in his family worked. My grandfather was a very hardworking person.

My birthday was celebrated by all our relatives. All our relatives came from Belarus and other places. We all gathered round the festive table. I had a separate children's table, where I was sitting together with my cousin. I remember my both grandfathers and my aunts on that day – my grandmothers had already passed away by that time. But we were all very much worried after the information we had heard on the radio about Germany's attack. Father was summoned to his military unit right from the celebration. Next day all our guests left for their homes, all around the country. Almost all of those, who went home to Belarus, perished. The Germans burnt and shot everyone.

My first aunt was Lubov, my mom's sister. Her surname after marriage was Nemtsova. She was born in 1895 and died in 1955. Lubov with her family and grandfather Abram [Avraham] lived in Belarus, in Kamyen. They had three children: sons Mikhail and Zinovy and daughter Sofia. Lubov's husband, Samuil, was a men's tailor. I remember how Mother told us that Grandfather accepted him into the family and she helped him to sew. He taught her the tailor's trade. Later it was her

profession, which allowed her to earn money. When in 1941 the Germans approached Kamyen, Aunt Lubov escaped with her children. She simply took them and ran. She arrived in Gorky region, where we were already living. Her husband Samuil was at the front and died right after the end of the war. She spoke poor Russian, mainly Yiddish.

I remember Efim Shukhman, my mom's eldest brother. He was the first to move to Leningrad at the end of 1920. He worked as a shoemaker in a co-operative in Leningrad, and he was a very good shoemaker. It was Efim who contributed greatly to the subsequent moving of his sisters and younger brother Naum to Leningrad. He perished at Nevsky Pyatachok on the approaches to Leningrad on 15th January 1943. [Nevskaya Dubrovka is a settlement on the right bank of the Neva river, where the troops of the Leningrad front twice (in September 1941 and in September 1942) forced a crossing over the Neva river and captured the beach-head on its left bank (the so-called Nevsky Pyatachok, meaning 'a very small plot of land near the Neva river'). They held their positions for about 400 days and participated in bloody battles.] I still keep the notification about his death. He served as a sniper.

After Daddy's death, my mom received only one letter from Efim, where he consoled her. He wrote that she shouldn't be afraid, because he would be helping her - she was his beloved little sister. It was he who gave the money for her wedding. Uncle Efim loved my mother very much, she was his favorite. She was the youngest and he was the eldest in the family. Uncle Efim sent my mother a parcel with food products and wrote a note saying that he would never leave her and help her to bring up her children. Mother wrote a reply to Efim, but soon we received a notification about his death. Thus Mother was left alone without any support. Uncle Efim is included in the electronic Memory Book [Terminal of the Electronic Memory Book can be found inside the Monument of Victory (it is a branch of the City Historical Museum) in St. Petersburg. Everyone, who perished during the battles of Leningrad, was put into the electronic data base. And everyone can come there, name a lost person and get a printed document. Sofia Furman has this sort of document regarding Efim, who perished near the Sinyavinskiye Vysoty, in Tartolovo settlement]. Grandfather Mendel, who starved to death in besieged Leningrad in the winter of 1941-1942, is also included in that Book.

My mom had another sister, Sofia Shukhman, but I know very little about her. I only know that she died on the day of her wedding. Mikhlya Shukhman - the wife of Avraham Shukhman - the mother of all these children had died early, in 1919. Her eldest daughter Lubov got married even earlier, and Sofia took care of all the younger children; she was a mother to them. Preparing to marry, Sofia felt very anxious about her younger sisters and brother - who would take care of them? She was thinking it over all the time: how would they manage without her? They all were little at that time, and she suffered from heart disease. Therefore on the day of her wedding she died, I don't know the details. I was named in her honor.

My mother's youngest brother was Naum; I have a photo of him taken before the war. During the war he was a pilot. Their squadron flew to bomb Berlin during the war. After the end of the war he served in the Far East - Kamchatka and Sakhalin - of the USSR.

Rita Shukhman was a disabled child. She had difficulties moving her hand and leg; she received medical treatment and lived here in Leningrad on Lermontovsky Prospect. Her sister Zlata Shukhman - everybody called her Zinaida - lived with her.

My mother Rosa Furman [nee Shukhman] was the sixth child, as Naum was the youngest. My mom died in 2000, and she was one month younger than 90. During the last eight years of her life she was bed-ridden – she couldn't walk.

The story of my parents' acquaintance was very simple. Actually, they were related to each other. Avraham Shukhman, my mother's father, had a sister, who was the wife of Mendel [Furman] and the mother of my father. That means my father's mother was a sister of Avraham Shukhman, my mother's father. As a girl, she – my father's mother – also was Shukhman. They also became related the following way: Bassya, my father's sister, was brought up in the family of my mother's father. And certainly, brothers often visited their sister Bassya in that family, they all were like relatives. And so my father, visiting his sister Bassya, fell in love with my mom, and so did my mom; and their relatives couldn't dissuade them from this. So against all dissuasions, they decided to get married. By that time my daddy was already a professional soldier, and they went to Belarus to get married. I keep their marriage certificate. It happened in 1934, and I was born in 1935. I don't know if they had a real Jewish wedding or if the wedding was secular. As far as I remember, my parents weren't religious and didn't stick to Jewish traditions. In the 1930s the traditional way of life became history [9](#), especially in families of Red Army commanders.

Before her marriage, Mother worked as a seamstress and after her marriage Father made her stay at home, because the salary of an officer allowed it. Father served in Levashevo [a village in the northern suburbs of Leningrad] at that time. Mother had only elementary education and finished seamstress courses, but being the wife of a commander, she was considered a 'woman-commander' in the military unit. She was involved in public affairs and was always busy. I remember how they often left me alone when I was small, and I even remember how I cried. They locked me in my room, I cried for some time and fell asleep.

Having got married, my parents lived in Osinovaya Roscha. We lived there happily. There were four of us: my mother and father, my brother Mikhail, who was born on 20th December 1939, and I. We moved to Osinovaya Roscha almost before the others, the military camp was under construction at that time, and the house was still damp, when we moved in. Our family occupied two rooms in one of the apartments. There was also a small room near the kitchen, where Father's aide-de-camp lived. We also had two neighbors, also military men, but I know nothing about them. And in this house we lived until 1941, when the war broke out.

### • During the War

When the war broke out, Father left for the frontline with his unit on the first day. His unit was already mobilized and left Osinovaya Roscha. They moved towards the border with Finland which fought against the USSR together with Germany. We stayed in Leningrad, in Osinovaya Roscha. In July 1941 my father's unit was transferred from one location to another and Father managed to visit us together with his privates. People were already being evacuated from Leningrad. The Germans were quite close to the city at that time and the last trains were leaving. Father managed to evacuate us to the Gorky region [region in the basin of the Volga river with a center in the town of Gorky, 1,000 km south-east of Leningrad], where his aide-de-camp's mother lived.

We left for evacuation in July by the last train, on our way Germans destroyed the train by bombing at some station. I remember my mom getting over the rails. My mom took care of me – at that time

I was six years old – my little brother, and she also took the daughter of her sister Zinaida [Zlata] with her, because Zinaida worked at a secret factory and they hadn't permitted her to leave Leningrad. So Zinaida entrusted my mom with her daughter, who was five months older than me. Her name was Inna Nikitina. So my mom with three children left Leningrad by a freight train. The process of our departure was frightful – it is engraved in my memory. Probably, we better remember the terrible moments of our life. I remember how we got into the car through the windows, there were a lot of people, the station was overcrowded, and soldiers stood between plank beds and lifted us over through the windows. Daddy forwarded some luggage to us, but it was lost somewhere. I still keep his last letter, which he sent us from the frontline, in which he wrote that he was worried about us, because we had left without any belongings and without warm clothes. We had only one suitcase with us, where we found nothing at all. So we appeared in Gorky region hungry and undressed, and we had to get settled somehow.

We came to the relatives of my father's adjutant near the village of Vad in Gorky region. But that place seemed to my mom to be very much out of the way, because there was no place to live and she couldn't get a job. We couldn't even understand the dialect people spoke! They added the word 'chai' [Russian for 'probably'] after almost each word, when they said something, 'Would you probably go there? Or would you probably not?' I remember how Mother laughed after the war, sometimes saying, 'Would you probably go there?' There were few people there. Only an elementary school was available. Then Mom got registered at the local military enlistment office, and the local commander sent us to Vad – a more civilized place, the center of the district.

At first Mother worked at the collective farm, doing temp work, and then a military hospital evacuated from Ukraine appeared in Vad. And my mom went there for work. At first she was a nurse – she had no special medical education – later she was taken to the operating-room – my mother was a very sociable and clever woman. An old professor – I don't remember his surname – was very nice to her and took care of her. He knew that she had three little children, who suffered from hunger. At the hospital they gave her some food, and she did her best to bring it to us, the children. And that professor saw that she was hungry and shared his ration 10 with her – and so did his wife. I remember that Mother brought home used bandages from the bandaging room. He gave it to her, advised her to boil them thoroughly. Mom used them to make clothes. He also tried to give her a glass or a spoon when an opportunity arose.

Some time later the hospital left for a place nearer to the front, and my mom had no opportunity to follow them because of her children. By that time my cousin [Inna Nikitina], who was in evacuation together with us, had died. It happened that we all – the three of us – got ill with measles, and she didn't recover, because her stomach was out of order. My brother and I had the eruptive stage, I remember, and Inna didn't, even her temperature was normal. But when I woke up one morning – we slept embracing one another – I found her dead. We had been good friends.

In evacuation, my mom received letters from the frontline from my daddy – the last letter came in August 1942. I keep it as a family relic, because it's the last piece of news from my father. It was written in pencil on a small sheet of paper. Having written that letter, he got lost, and we didn't receive any more letters from him and knew nothing about him. Time passed and we got to know that he'd perished.

In evacuation, my aunt Lubov – my mother’s eldest sister – and Bassya – my mother’s cousin – spoke mainly Yiddish, though they weren’t as religious, as their father – Avraham Shukhman. My mom and my aunts from Leningrad – Ghita and Zlata – also spoke Yiddish. When we lived in Gorky region, they mainly spoke Yiddish to each other and I also learned this language involuntarily. In September 1943 I went to school in Vad and finished the 1st grade before returning to Leningrad. I remember only one thing about the village school. I tried to speak Yiddish there. But the village children started to tease me because of it! I became shy and very quickly lost my knowledge of the language. Completely.

Mom and Daddy also spoke Yiddish. But Daddy was a professional soldier, and among them they never put a premium on it. All my subsequent adult life also discouraged me of that knowledge. The only thing that connected us to Jewish traditions was that my mom cooked traditional Jewish food very well; Jewish cuisine was very famous at that time. Now I like cooking very much, but I live alone and there is nobody to cook for, maybe just on holidays or for my son.

We returned to Leningrad in 1944, as soon as the siege was lifted. We were among the first to get back to Leningrad from evacuation. Mother’s sister Ghita Abramovna lived on the corner of Lermontovsky Prospect and Soyuza Pechatnikov Street. She stayed in Leningrad all the time of the siege. Her husband worked at a military headquarters, and he sent an invitation [11](#) for my mom – because she was the wife of a military man.

Ghita Abramovna survived the war and the siege of Leningrad, she died only in 1969. She felt unhappy. One day when she was at home, a shell demolished a corner of her house, but she remained alive, she was only pushed strongly by an air-wave. In 1944 after the end of the war we assisted her in the reconstruction of her apartment. I remember that time [1944] in Leningrad. When I walked along the streets of Leningrad, I was surprised to see that the city, so ruthlessly destroyed, didn’t make such an impression. I saw a lot of windows, drawn on a cardboard and fragments of houses assembled like shields. Probably it was done to hide the destroyed houses; it was a sort of camouflage. So, here you go, look from a distance – it looks like a house, and when you come closer you can see only ruins. There were a lot of badly destroyed buildings, and if you looked from aside they looked as repaired and camouflaged, the authorities kept an eye on it. In January the siege was lifted, and in April we arrived in Leningrad. I remember that when we reached home, there was no snow any more.

Zlata Shukhman – we called her aunt Zina – who sent her daughter Inna in evacuation with us, where she died – arrived in Gorky region –they permitted her to leave Leningrad, when the siege was already lifted –and buried her daughter. Up to the last day she cried over her loss. All her life she cried and didn’t remarry. Each year she visited her daughter’s grave. When she became incapable of doing it, Aunt Zlata brought some soil from Inna’s grave to Leningrad and buried it in a common grave, where Aunt Ghita was already buried – at an ordinary cemetery, where there were Jewish zones [12](#). Later I buried Aunt Zlata and my mom there too.

Before the war the husband of Aunt Zlata Shukhman was subjected to repression and exiled [13](#). Her husband was a Pole by nationality, probably a Polish Jew. They both graduated from Moscow University. She even worked as an instructor at a District Committee of the Communist Party, and he was a teacher in Sverdlovsk Institute. Later he was arrested on the grounds of some made-up charges and released only after the end of the war. After her husband’s arrest Aunt Zina escaped



together with her girl. She left all her documents, she left everything. At first she worked at laundries, did hard work during the war, i.e. she went into hiding, she was afraid of arrest. And then she started working in LENENERGO [Leningrad Energy Organization] as an inspector. She retired at the age of 60. After the end of the war, I know that she sent her husband many parcels, but I don't know what happened to him later. Probably he married, or maybe he died. In our family it was a forbidden topic, I wasn't grown-up yet and I couldn't speak about it.

### • **After the War**

When in spring of 1944 we returned from evacuation to Leningrad, I remember that we went to Ozerki [suburb of Leningrad] by tram, and then walked to Osinovaya Roscha - where we'd lived before the war in the military camp. It was a long way, and my brother Misha and I were little children. I remember that we often stopped and had a rest on our way. When we reached our place, we found our apartment plundered. Before evacuation we handed over a part of our belongings to the Municipal Operational Military Unit, which was situated in Levashevo, and we got them back. But it was small potatoes. When we came back, we had an absolutely empty room, a brick embrasure as a window, soldier's rack and soldier's bed without a mattress in the corner. And nothing else. We lived there at the very least till 1967, in any case my mom and my brother did. As for me, I left our home for some time.

After the end of the war my younger brother Misha was five years old. In evacuation I finished the first grade. When we arrived in Leningrad, we found out that in Osinovaya Roscha there was no school, and I went to school in Levashevo. It was one-and-a-half kilometers away from our house. There was no transport, and I went to school on foot. I remember that the school was situated across the railroad. I left home at seven in the morning and went to school on foot. I had to walk through the forest along a scary road. Would parents let their child walk such a way nowadays? But my mother worked. I liked to come first to the classroom, when there was no one there yet. I came in and switched on the light. That was my nature. I remained like that all my life, and later when I was a grownup, I was the first to come to work.

I walked in the school corridor and heard behind my back, 'Jewess!' Some people treated us very well and some said, 'These so-and-so came and ate all our food!' But in general I was treated well for some reason. I was always a naughty child, like a boy. I had a friend, a Jewish girl. She was always teased, though she was half-Russian. The teachers were no anti-Semites. Our primary grades' teacher always protected me and scolded my little torturers. She even told me, 'Don't tell anyone that you are a Jewess.' Some children, especially from uneducated families, could say something bad. Especially when we were in the junior grades. I remember how boys from our class fought with other boys, defending me, if someone had offended me. Mother always tried to smoothen such conflicts and told me not to pay attention. We had a big communal apartment, so we tried not to focus on the Jewish issue. But sometimes I thought to myself, 'I will never marry a Jew, I don't want my children to suffer.' I cried so much when I was a little girl! Later when I grew up, I didn't feel this children's anti-Semitism, people treated me well.

I finished four grades in that school and continued my education in a seven-year school near the railroad, which was one kilometer closer to our home, also in Levashevo. I finished seven grades there without bad marks, I was a good pupil. My friends were children with whom I went to school. We played different games; I liked sport games very much, like volleyball, soccer. We liked the

swing too and reached the high tree branches, when swinging! I could play outside for hours! Only once I went to a pioneer [14](#) camp on summer holidays. The camp was located in the village of Pesochnoye [a settlement on the northern outskirts of Leningrad, near Levashevo and Osinovaya Roscha]. Later only my brother was sent to pioneer camps. We weren't a rich family. That is why mostly my brother got new toys, skis and a bicycle. I remember, when I was in the 8th grade, Aunt Zinaida and Aunt Ghita arranged wonderful holidays for me. They lived together at that time and I stayed with them for my winter holidays. I went to Mariinsky Theater every day. At that time it was called the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theater. I have seen its whole repertoire, all operas.

Mikhail attended a kindergarten. Later, when he grew up he went to school in Osinovaya Roscha – it was already opened by that time. I was already in the sixth or seventh grade, when he went to school. In Mikhail's school I was a leader of Octobrists [15](#), and later right in his class. After seven years in Osinovaya Roscha School, he studied in Pargolovo School. Misha participated in the construction of that school, boys worked there as masons – the authorities stimulated their interest. After I finished seven grades, I then moved to Pargolovo high school and finished ten grades there.

I remember very well the day of Stalin's death – 6th March 1953. [Joseph Stalin died on 5th March 1953.] I was a schoolgirl at that time. We didn't know anything about his evil deeds at the time. We cried the whole lesson, like fools. All girls sat in the classroom and cried. We disrupted all lessons on that day. But we didn't cry because we were sorry. We cried because we wanted to disrupt the lessons, we did that on purpose. When I found out later what Stalin wanted to do with the Jews [16](#), I understood everything. But when he died we didn't know anything. Who could have told us?

One day Mother's brother Naum visited us, at that time he served in Chita; he was a second in command – a pilot-scout. He came together with his wife and invited me to go with him. We lived in need, and he told me that it would be easier for me to enter an institute [university] there, than in Leningrad. At that time I dreamed to become a teacher, a teacher of history.

In Leningrad it was really difficult to enter an institute, and we had nothing to live on, therefore I decided to leave for Chita, to follow Uncle Naum's advice. There I entered the Pedagogical Institute – History Faculty, later we were merged with the Foreign Languages Faculty, and later – with the Literary Faculty. So I graduated from the History and Philology Faculty in 1959. There was obligatory assignment for graduates at that time [17](#), and I went to Uletovsky district [120 kilometers away from Chita] according to my appointment. The village was called Ulety – 120 kilometers away from the railway station. There was only one well in the village.

That village was situated in Siberia. It was such wilderness, that people who lived there, had never seen the railroad in their lives. Many had never left the village. There was no radio, nothing. I was placed on the premises of an old deserted school. I shared a room with the teacher of mathematics. It was dangerous for a young girl to live alone in Balzoy [Chita region (Transbaikalia) was a place, where a lot of exiled persons and geologists lived, who were often drunk and were able to force their way into her house.

Houses in the settlement stood far apart, and there was nobody to help. And she was a very young girl, a recent graduate, 22 years old] and it wasn't possible to go out at night. A geological group was stationed in the village. The workers drank, shouted, enjoyed themselves and made a lot of noise. We shut the door and trembled with fear the whole night, we were scared that drunken men

would rush into the house. I was very much afraid to live there. I was afraid of everything: of men, of dogs, of cows and bulls.

On my way home from school in the evening, I was very nervous, I was scared to walk in the village. Bulls and cows walked right along the streets. When a herd approached me, I didn't know what to do. I was a city girl and could not get used to the village life. I needed protection.

### • **Marriage, children and later life**

Of course, I married there quickly and gave birth to my dear son Mikhail. My husband was a mechanic and later he went to Chita to study at the Agricultural Technical School. He finished it. Then in Irkutsk [city in Siberia] he graduated from the Agricultural Institute. Our family life was a failure. At the school I worked in two shifts and there were no day nursery or kindergarten or nannies in Balzoy. My mother-in-law couldn't stay with my son, as she was busy with her own household. Who to leave my little son with?

I submitted an application asking to release me from administrative obligations and continued to work as a teacher of Russian language, literature and history only. When I went to work, I left my son with a woman who lived across the street and visited her during the working day to feed my baby. Certainly there was no due care for the baby. Once a pig almost bit off his arm, then when he started walking he got hit by a horse, luckily, he wasn't hurt then. I shouldn't have lived like that with a baby. I quit my job, basing my decision upon my family circumstances.

It happened in 1961 and I returned to Leningrad. Later my husband visited me twice in Leningrad and urged me to return, but I refused. I wasn't able to get a divorce, because he didn't agree for a long time to divorce me. Only in 1964 I persuaded him with great difficulty and we got divorced.

On my arrival in Leningrad new complications appeared – they refused to register me [18](#) at my mom's room, where from I had left before the institute. Actually, they didn't permit me to live there – go where you want! And I had to get a job – my acquaintances assisted me – in the settlement of Roschino as a pioneer leader at the eight-year school. I worked there and rented a room for some time. I was hard up – it was necessary to pay a nurse, to pay for the room, though a part of this sum was paid by the school.

I placed my son in the kindergarten in Osinovaya Roscha. The kindergarten was far away from home, in the forest. I had to drag him there early in the morning and run to school in order to be on time for the lessons which started at nine in the morning. A lot of things were done in the kindergarten on a voluntary basis and children's parents helped the kindergarten teachers. Mikhail's kindergarten teacher told me, 'Don't just come and work yourself, bring your children from school.' We cleaned the big site, removed the leaves, helped to conduct the children's celebrations. All in all, Mikhail's teacher treated me very well. My son was brought up there in good conditions.

Later I managed to get a job in Osinovaya Roscha School. Teachers who had taught me, still worked there and they knew me very well. All positions of teachers were occupied and I got a job as a pioneer leader. Later my school manager moved me to Pargolovo School, where I got a very small salary: I gave few lessons – I taught history. But unfortunately the headmaster of that school gave this place to another one, who was a teacher of history too, and he took away my lessons of

history and foisted pioneer work upon me.

My mom worked at the Commander-in-Chief's; on the whole she had a sort of hush-hush work, something like housekeeping at the Commander-in-Chief's. Soldiers were subordinated to her informally and assisted her. As she worked all her life in the military camp, she also took the military oath. In 1968 my mom retired, and the military camp she worked for gave her an apartment in Leningrad, near Chernaya Rechka, where I live now. And as we moved from Pargolovo together with my mom and it was a long way to get to my work – to the school, I managed to get a job at the Public Library. When I came there, it turned out that according to secret laws they didn't give jobs to Jews.

They gave me a job only in the department of newspapers and only because its manager was Jewish – she had been working there for a long time – during the siege of Leningrad too. Her name was Tatyana Solomonovna Grigoryan, and it was she who gave me work. Her department lacked people and it was very hard physical work – to carry large volumes of newspapers 'Pravda,' 'Leningradskaya Pravda,' volumes of several months. So we carried them from place to place, and sometimes it was required to file newspapers for a period of 30 years! Imagine shelves five meters high! So we used step-ladders and carriages – it was a very hard job.

I worked during the daytime and attended higher library courses in the evening for a year. In fact I obtained a second university education, as I passed all exams under the program of the Library Institute. I finished the courses and began to work as a librarian, then as a senior librarian and later as a senior editor. I worked at the division of cataloging, described and annotated newspaper funds. I retired in 1990 from the position of chief librarian. I had been working at the Public Library for 22 years. I was awarded medals for valorous labor.

The team at the Public Library was intending to accept me to the Communist Party. The Communist organization at the Library was big. Each department or group of departments had its own Party nucleus. I was rather active in public work out of my school habits. I worked as an agitator and a political informer. Once a fortnight I gathered all employees of our department and instructed them on what was going on in the cultural life of our city and country and issues of the state's internal policy – issues of foreign policy were introduced by another person. I drew information for my reports from newspapers, summarized it and told people with my own comments. During the pre-election campaign I worked as an electioneering agent.

Our Party nucleus actively pushed me through to the Party. Everybody told me, 'A historian should be a member of the Party.' They had been 'pushing me through' there for three years. I wanted to affiliate with the Party very much, but Jews were admitted very reluctantly. I was educated in the sphere of history and literature, and working at school, I confronted the fact that teaching of history in senior grades – I mean History of the USSR – was entrusted only to party members, i.e. to specially approved persons. I know – they told me – that at party meetings of our unit they discussed my nomination several times: they decided whether I deserve their recommendation or not. So I was a candidate for the Party from 1969 till 1970 – more than a year. I

In 1975 I joined the Party. In a year I was elected secretary of the primary party organization, which united Communists of three departments: the newspaper department, the oriental studies' department, the department of national literature in the languages of the USSR peoples. Besides my direct job I had to manage the party organization, make speeches at meetings and work with

personnel. Before retirement, I had been working for twelve years in the party organization. I left home early in the morning at 7.30 and came back home late at night. I had no free time. I had friends only at work.

I didn't experience any oppression on the basis of anti-Semitism, though sometimes unpleasant feelings related to my nationality arose. Sometimes I even felt uneasy at work. For example, when I sat at the meeting of political informers at the Party District Committee, devoted to the newspapers overview, and the instructor explained to us, what one was allowed to say about Jews and what had to be held back. I sat in front of him and avoided his stare. It was certainly awful. I also faced problems when looking for a job. My patronymic is Ayzikovna. My father's name was Ayzik and it was in his documents too. But when I worked at school, everybody called me Arkadyevna [19](#). Even the Head of the District National Education advised me, 'If people distort your patronymic, say that it is Arkadyevna.' When I returned to Leningrad and was looking for a job, I also had problems. My real patronymic – Ayzikovna – is written in all my documents.

My son Mikhail was born in 1960, on 4th December. I named him Mikhail in honor of my brother. When my brother was born – and I was a child at that time – it was I who gave him his name Mikhail. It happened because Bassya's husband was Mikhail, and I liked him very much, though I was a girl then – he seemed very handsome to me. And I tried to persuade my parents to name my brother Mikhail.

But I lived with my son and my mother, who was an old woman by that time. When I began to work at the Public Library, Mikhail went to school. At first he stayed at the extended day group for the whole day. Later, when Mother retired in 1967, she stayed with him after lessons and took care of him. Before retirement Mother was provided with an apartment in Leningrad. We moved to the center of the city. Mikhail studied in the eight-year school located on Serdobolskaya Street and finished it with good marks. He was the favorite pupil of the teacher of literature and wrote good compositions. Since I worked at the library she always used me and asked me to talk to her pupils about books. I often went to their school and gave lectures about various pieces of literature.

After the 8th grade my son tried to enter Suvorov College, which trains officers. He passed all exams but wasn't accepted. His documents, which he submitted to the entrance examination commission, stated, 'Mother is a Jewess' [20](#). Mikhail decided to enter the Suvorov Military College, though we knew that they didn't accept Jews: a secret rule everyone knew about. The formal reason for refusal was his poor eyesight. Mikhail wanted to become a professional soldier very much – like his grandfather and my father: I told him a lot about my father. He continued to study in high school at the mathematical department. However, he was in a bad mood the whole year. He simply didn't want to study. I cried a lot during that time. He said that it didn't make any sense because he wouldn't be accepted to any place. He was in a really bad mood, he was very much offended. However, he finished the ten-year school in 1977 with good marks and entered the Higher Military Engineering College of Communication – at present it is called the Academy of Communication.

While my son studied there, he lived in barracks. During the first two or three years cadets were allowed to leave their barracks only at weekends – but not every weekend. I would be sticking around the entrance of the college together with mothers of other cadets for five years. We quarreled, but dragged bags full of food for our sons, as they were always hungry, especially during

the first year, until they got used to the army rules. In senior courses he spent nights at home more often.

Being not indifferent to the destiny of his grandfather – my father – he searched for information about him. He also got information about Efim, my mother's brother, who perished in Kirovsky district and was buried there. It was Mikhail who pressed the regional military registration and enlistment office for his burial.

While Mikhail studied at the military college, he faced anti-Semitism all the time. I think that people do this because of lack of good breeding. Why should I be ashamed of my nationality? Mikhail thought the same. I told him, 'I'd better not come to your college, so that you won't be teased.' But he took me by the hand and proudly stalked along the cadets. He said he didn't care about their tricks and about what they said. He said that he wouldn't be ashamed of his mother. He was really very proud of me. He graduated from the college in 1982 in the rank of an engineer-lieutenant and was assigned to serve at the practice military unit in Pereyaslavl –Zalessky [an ancient Russian town near Moscow]. He was the platoon commander at first and later taught military disciplines at the soldiers' school and obtained the rank of senior lieutenant.

In 1987 he was assigned to the town of Aleysk in Altay [a mountainous region in the south of Western Siberia, 3,500 km east of St. Petersburg]. He served there in rocket forces and stayed in an underground bunker. He got his rank of a captain there. Soon he returned to Pereyaslavl-Zalessky and married a Russian woman. Her name was Olga, she worked – and works to date – at school as a teacher of English language. In 1991 his son, Alexey, was born and in 1996 Mikhail got transferred to St. Petersburg, but his wife refused to join him. They got divorced. The child stayed with the mother, she never let her son anywhere away from her. He is a very good boy and loves his father very much. He said, 'Dad, let's run away from Mother, she may stay where she wants.' Mikhail calls him every week, visits him on his birthdays and other holidays. He visited St. Petersburg every year with his mother, but not this year [2002].

Mikhail worked at the city military registration and enlistment office. Later he was given a promotion and the rank of a major and was assigned to the town of Volodga. He worked there for a year and several months. It was the economic crisis period, when the officers didn't get paid and had no apartments. He lived there alone. He got demobilized in 2002 after 20 years of service and got a small pension. Certainly he wasn't going to retire but it was a terrible time. Reduction of the army started and he quit. He was looking for a job for a long time and tried many jobs. He took courses of drivers a long time ago, took security guards' courses and obtained a license for security guarding, but still it wasn't easy to find a proper job. He tried to get a job as a security guard, of an agent in a travel agency and a manager in a small company. His friends also tried to help him and offered him a position at some warehouse, but he refused and said, 'I shall not work there, there's nothing to do.' Thus my son wasn't needed by anyone after 20 years of service for his Motherland. He also took courses of marketing and found a job related to real estate. He has been working in this field for two years already. I think he likes it. Though he grumbles, it seems that he loves his job, because he is responsible for many things – he has to check everything, find out information and make arrangements with people.

I sometimes thought about immigrating to Israel, but my life developed in such a way that I couldn't leave, though in fact it was possible. While Mikhail worked in Altay, I got married for the

second time in 1988, when I was 53 years old already. My husband's name was Vladimir Libin, he was a Jew. He was a very nice man. His first wife died a long time ago when he was a young man. She was ill for a long time, she had cancer. Vladimir took care of her and brought up their son, he was both a mother and a father. His son's name is Mikhail too. He has grown up and works now as a doctor at the ambulance. He is a good doctor. His wife is also a doctor and they have two children.

At the end of the 1980s Mikhail's family suddenly decided to leave for Israel. They got packed quickly and in several months left for the town of Ashkelon. They wrote letters to his father asking him to come. They even took offence at me, though I didn't hold him back. Certainly Vladimir was torn between me and them. I told him that I couldn't leave. My mother was more than 80 years old, she was sick and senile and lived until her 90th birthday. She spent the last six years of her life in bed and didn't get up. Besides, my son Mikhail served in the Soviet army. If I had left, he would have been dismissed from the army [21](#). How could I have left? I couldn't have left my mother alone.

My husband Vladimir left alone after long hesitation. He was waiting for me for two years in Israel and continued to ask me to come, but I didn't go. He even wanted to return to St. Petersburg, but I talked him out of it, telling him, 'You will keep striving to go back.' His children and grandchildren lived there. I understood him but cried. We corresponded after that. If he had left some time later, I would have gone with him. My mother died in 2000 – she was buried at the Jewish cemetery in the same grave as her sister – and my son retired from the army in 2002. My main problems were gone and I was ready to join my husband in Israel. However, Vladimir died in 1999. So I never visited Israel, but dreamed about it all my life.

Besides my mother and son Mikhail the closest person to me was my younger brother Mikhail. When we returned to Leningrad after evacuation he was five years old. There was no kindergarten in our military settlement and I stayed with him at home all the time. The kindergarten was arranged a year after, and Mikhail attended it for a year. When I went to school in Levashevo, Mikhail went to elementary school, which was opened in Osinovaya Roscha in 1947. I took care of him as I was the pioneer leader in that school. Later he went to Pargolovo School. My brother was very clever and got only excellent marks. As a pupil of senior grades he worked in addition at a construction site, but still managed to finish the ten-year school with excellent marks. In 1957 he entered the Military Mechanical Institute and graduated from it with excellent results too. They wanted him to stay at the post-graduate department, but the subfaculty preferred a different student. Mikhail was assigned to work at the machinery construction plant in the town of Kremenchug [today Ukraine]. It was 1962, if I am not mistaken. He left and in a month received a telegram from the institute about a vacancy at the subfaculty and an invitation to the post-graduate department. But he was offended and refused to go back. So he stayed in Kremenchug.

He worked at that plant, which produced machinery for road construction, from the beginning of his assignment term until retirement. At first he worked as a shop engineer, later at the SCB [Special Construction Bureau], then he was appointed Manager of the SCB and received the honorary title of 'Best inventor of the USSR Ministry of Engineering Industry.' He studied at the post-graduate department by correspondence for four years, wrote a dissertation on road pavements, but failed to defend it. Key specialists from Leningrad and Moscow had a quarrel with Kremenchug and his

dissertation was 'killed.' He had a nervous breakdown and fell sick with diabetes. He was sick for many years and complications began. He underwent an operation in Kremenchug and his leg was amputated. He returned to the plant but in 1996 he was forced to retire based on disablement at the age of 56. It was a real blow for him. He died a year after that, in 1997.

My brother's wife Polina is a Ukrainian Jewess. My brother met her in Kremenchug, I don't know any details of their encounter. Polina's mother and father were religious people, they spoke good Yiddish and observed Jewish Tradition for certain, but I visited them in Kremenchug only once and have only a rough idea about it. In any case, Polina also knew Yiddish and brought the tradition to her family. I know little about it, because we saw each other once a year, when they came to visit us. She finished a library school, later graduated from the Library Institute and still works. She holds the position of Regional Library Department Head in Kremenchug. She is a very nice and active woman and people treat her well.

They had two children: son Alexander and daughter Galina. Alexander was born in 1967 and finished the ten-year school in Kremenchug. Later he studied at the Machinery Construction Institute in Moscow and lived in a dormitory. He served in the army for two years. He returned to Kremenchug and worked at the plant where his father worked. When Mikhail became disabled, Alexander took him to the plant in a wheelchair. After Mikhail was fired, Alexander was so much worried about his father that he quit his job too. He found a job in a private company and still works there as an assistant. He earns a good salary. The company specializes in computers and various office equipment. Alexander married a girl he went to school with. His wife's name is Marina. Her family came to Kremenchug from Estonia before she was born. I know almost nothing about her family, but the fact that her father worked at the network of railway lines. Alexander and Marina have no children. Marina works at a machinery construction plant. Alexander has been sick for the last years. He was exposed to radioactive irradiation when he served in the army. Now he has problems with his liver and kidneys and he's gained a lot of extra weight.

In 1980 my brother and his wife Polina had another baby, a daughter Galina. She was a late child and her father's favorite. Polina gave birth to stillborn children several times. But then Galina was born. She got only excellent marks at school and was the best pupil. She finished the school with a medal [distinction]. Later she studied in Kremenchug at the Machinery Construction Institute and obtained the profession of a machinery construction engineer. She is a very clever girl and has always been a leader in the KVN ['The Club of Jolly and Smart,' a popular entertainment contest in the USSR] at the institute and their team even appeared on stage representing Kremenchug. She is very fond of artistic knitting. She helped her mother to earn some additional money with it when she was a student. All in all, she is a smart girl. It's not possible to find a job in her professional field in Kremenchug now; she took accountants' courses and works as an accountant now. Galina is married to a Ukrainian, his name is Vitaly; I don't remember his last name. They have a good family, they both work and recently their daughter was born.

- **Glossary:**

## **1 Collective farm (in Russian 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.

**2** Blockade of Leningrad: On 8th September 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until 27th January 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.

### **3 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

### **4 Politprosvet**

system of political education in the USSR, aimed at educating the population in the spirit of communist ideology and devotion to the Soviet power. Ideological work was carried out through a vast net of various cultural and educational institutions, the activity of which covered all levels and groups of Soviet citizens. Participation in political education was an important condition for building a career.

### **5 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 Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim 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.

### **6 Order of the Combat Red Banner**

Established in 1924, it was awarded for bravery and courage in the defense of the Homeland.

### **7 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)**

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into

the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

## **8 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.

## **9 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.

## **10 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 abolished in 1947.

## **11 Invitation**

after the siege of Leningrad was lifted in January 1944, the city authorities established temporary restrictions on the evacuated citizens' return home. These restrictions were caused by considerable destruction of available housing and municipal services and acute shortage of housing. For entry in Leningrad, it was necessary to have an official invitation of a ministry, plant, establishment, or a member of the family residing in the city. Such an invitation was called 'a call-in'.

## **12 Jewish section of cemetery**

In the USSR city cemeteries were territorially divided into different sectors. They often included common plots, children's plots, titled militaries' plots, Jewish plots, political leaders' plots, etc. In some Soviet cities the separate Jewish cemeteries continued to be maintained and in others they were closed, usually with the excuse that it was due to some technical reason. The family could decide upon the burial of the deceased; Jewish military could for instance be buried either in the military or the Jewish section. Such a division of cemeteries still continues to exist in many parts of

the former Soviet Union.

### **13 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.

### **14 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.

### **15 Young Octobrist**

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

### **16 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

### **17 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.

## **18 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

## **19 Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

## **20 Item 5**

This was the ethnicity/nationality factor, which was included on all official documents and job application forms. Thus, the Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were more easily discriminated against from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

## **21 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.