

Tsylia Shapiro

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Lvov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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Tsylia Shapiro and her husband live in a nicely furnished two-room apartment. They have been a wealthy family. Tsylia is a beautiful woman, nice and hospitable. She is very sad – she says she’s lost the joy of her life with the loss of her daughter. And she promptly changes the subject to her granddaughter Alyona.

My grandmother and grandfather on my father’s side, Iosele and Zlata Potievskiye, were born in the town of Malin, Zhytomir region, 200 kilometers from Kiev, in the 1850s. The population of Malin accounted to 20 thousand people at that time. Jews constituted the majority of the population. They were craftsmen such as shoemakers, tailors, watchmakers, glass cutters, carpenters and bricklayers, and vendors for the most part.

Grandfather Iosif was a bricklayer. They were religious and strictly observed all Jewish traditions. He went to the synagogue in Malin. I know that he went there and prayed, but that is all I know since my grandfather died long before I was born.

My grandparents had many children and Grandfather decided to build a big house where all their children could live with their families. He began the construction, but he didn’t have enough money to complete it.

In the early 1920s he went to America with his older son whose name I don’t know. In the USA, my grandfather and my father’s older brother happened to pass by a demonstration of workers where police used weapons. Many people were killed including my grandfather Iosele and his son. My grandmother Zlata got very ill when she heard this sad news. She died in 1903 – just a few years after this terrible loss of her husband and son.

I didn’t know all of my grandparents’ brothers and sisters. I only remember my grandfather’s younger brother Moshe. He lived in the very center of the town Malin and had a small store just next door to his apartment. In the 1920s he was declared a NEP-man [1] and the authorities expropriated his store and apartment. He died shortly afterward.

His wife died before the revolution [2] and his children moved to other towns. I knew his older daughter Riva. Riva had a very nice and caring husband, Haim, and three sons. Once her cousin brother from Leningrad came to visit her. He fell in love with Riva and convinced her to go with him. It was a scandal all over the town. I remember Haim, always so reserved, crying and threatening Riva and her cousin and his parents trying to calm him down.

Later Riva divorced Haim and took her children to Leningrad. They all got higher education. I saw Riva only once when she came to Uncle Gershl’s golden wedding anniversary. Later we didn’t keep

in touch with her.

Besides my father's brother that perished in America my father had three other brothers and two sisters. The boys finished cheder and studied at the Jewish primary school. The girls also got primary education.

Gedali, the oldest, born in 1888, was a high-skilled cabinetmaker. He earned well and always had enough money. Gedali enjoyed throwing money in restaurants and for women. He married a very pretty Jewish girl, Reizl, from another town: she was a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl and had 'a character of an angel,' as they say. She was an orphan and her uncle that raised her didn't quite want to let her marry Gedali who had a spoiled reputation. However, Gedali managed to have Reizl marry him.

Shortly after the wedding Gedali returned to his former way of life – he went out and drank a lot and was not faithful to Reizl. Reizl kept silent and cried at night. Her relatives talked to Gedali and insisted on divorce and compensation enough for Reizl to buy an apartment. They divorced.

Sometime afterward Gedali married a strong-willed woman – Ida. She tamed her husband's violent temper and he lived a quiet life with her under her dictation. Gedali didn't have any children. During the war Gedali was in evacuation somewhere in the taiga in the North. He died in Malin three years after the war.

Rachel, coming next after Gedali, was born in 1890. She became a very good dressmaker. During the Soviet power in the 1930s she had high official clients in Kiev. She went to Kiev where she made fashionable clothing for them and stayed there for several months in a row. Rachel married Efim Glozman before the Great Patriotic War [3]. Rachel and Efim didn't have any children. Rachel died in evacuation in 1940s.

The next sister, Raitsa, born in 1892, was ill with tuberculosis. She died in 1927.

Motl, born after my father in 1895, graduated from the Agricultural Institute in Odessa and became an agronomist. He got married. During the Great Patriotic War Motl was recruited to the army. He didn't return from the war. I have no information about his wife or children – we were out of touch with them.

The youngest of the children – Grisha, or Gershl, was born in 1898. In the early 1920s Grisha entered the machine-building college in Zaporozhiye. He fell in love with his landlady's daughter, a Jewish girl, Annette. She was a schoolgirl and Grisha promised her that he would wait until she finished school to marry her. They got married after she finished school.

At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War Grisha went to the army. Annette and their two children – son Emila and daughter Yana, who was born few months before the war – went into evacuation. Grisha couldn't find them for a few years. After the war they met; his wife and children were in Omsk and Grisha joined them after demobilization.

Emil became a good doctor and Yana graduated from the Pedagogical Institute. Uncle Gershl died in the middle of the 1970s and his children Emil and Yana live in the USA with their families.

My father Emil Potievskiy was born in 1893. He only studied in cheder. When his father and older brother were killed in America my father took responsibility for the family: Rachel was married and had to take care of her own family and Gedali didn't care about the family.

My father went to work at the age of 14 - he became an apprentice of a cabinetmaker.

My father served in the tsarist army and participated in World War I, he was a private, struggled against Bolsheviks [4] somewhere in Russia. In 1917 he was slightly wounded and demobilized. He returned home in 1917. After the revolution of 1917 my father went to work at the furniture factory in Malin.

My father was a tall and handsome fair-haired man. When he was in his teens he fell in love with his cousin on his mother's side - my future mother. It was customary in the Jewish community for cousins to form a family and my parents got married in 1921. My parents had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah in the synagogue. They had only a small wedding party - this was a hard period of revolution and civil war [5].

My mother's parents, Khaya and Avrum Feldman, lived in the village of Guta near Zhytomir. It was a Ukrainian village and there were only three or four Jewish families there.

My grandparents were very religious. There was no synagogue in the village and my grandfather prayed at home twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, with his tallit and tefillin on. I remember taking them out to show them to my friends without asking my grandfather. This was the only time when my grandfather lost his temper and yelled at me, stamping his feet.

Every Friday my grandmother cleaned the house claying the ground floors - they were shining like an egg yolk. She made food for Saturday and kept it in the Russian stove [6] to keep it warm. On Friday evening we sat down for dinner after washing ourselves and dressing up. My grandmother lit candles saying words of prayer and we started our meal: freshly made challah, chicken and clear soup with dumplings, stewed meat with potato pancakes and stewed carrots. Sometimes my grandfather managed to get some fish from fishermen and we had gefilte fish then.

My grandmother Khaya was the sister of Zlata, my father's mother's sister. My mother told me that they owned an inn before the revolution. There were three rooms and a kitchen in the house. Two rooms served as hotel rooms for guests - there were beds in them. My grandmother didn't have housemaids. She did all work by herself. It was a small village and there were not many visitors coming to stay overnight.

My grandmother cooked common food for visitors and when Jews arrived - she tried to make food following the kosher rules: she had special utensils for dairy and meat products. But of course, there was no kosher meat in the village, since there was no shochet.

My mother, her brother and sister helped their parents about the house, with work in the garden and to take care of their livestock. My grandparents had no education and could not afford to pay for their children's education, but Grandfather Avrum wanted to give his children at least primary Jewish education. They hired a melamed that taught the children Yiddish and basics of religion. The family spoke Yiddish at home, but they also knew Ukrainian, which they spoke with Ukrainians.

Shulka, the oldest in the family, was born in 1890. Shulka was a beauty: a tall and stately fair-haired girl, and her fiancé, Itzyk Pekker, was also a handsome man. Itzyk came from the town of Chepovitsy near Korosten. He met Shulka at a Jewish wedding. Itzyk was a wealthy man – he was a tradesman.

However, they had to wait for seven years before they could get married. Itzyk's mother's name was Shulka, too, and Jewish law didn't allow a daughter-in-law and mother-in-law to have the same name. Itzyk and Shulka got married in 1916, after Itzyk's mother died, and my mother's sister moved to his house in Chepovitsy.

They had two sons – lonele, born in 1917, and Aron, born in 1918. My mother, who was single at that time, moved to her sister to help her take care of the children and the house.

There were pogroms [7] during the civil war. In one of them Petliura [8] or the gang of the Greens [9] attacked the town. My mother and Shulka with the children ran to the woods, but Itzyk was brutally beaten, tied to a horse's tail and pulled across the village.

When the sisters came back to the town Itzyl was in a coma. My mother was holding him when he died. My mother told me how they all grieved for him and Shulka cried and was out of her mind grieving. Little lonele looked at the moon when he was in the yard with his mother asking, 'Moon, show my father the way home!' lonele fell ill and died shortly after the pogrom.

Aron went to the army during the Great Patriotic War. He was severely wounded and when he was in hospital a medical nurse fell in love with him. She was trying every medication to bring him to recovery. But neither medications nor her care helped Aron. He died in 1943. After the war this medical nurse found us in Malin and told us the story of the last days of his life.

Shulka married a butcher named Shymchik whose wife died. At that time a Jewish widow who had children could only marry a widower and take care of his children. Shychik had four children and Shulka cared about them as she did about her own children.

Shymchik owned a butcher store, but in the late 1920s when the NEP was over the Soviet authorities expropriated his shop and threw his family – Shulka and the five children – out of their apartment. They lived with us for some time. After Gedali, my father's brother, divorced and went to live with his second wife, they moved into his former apartment.

Shulka had two more children: Tsylia and Itzyk. Shymchik died before the war. Shulka and Tsylia were in evacuation with us. Itzyk perished at the front and Shulka and Tsylia returned to Malin. Shulka died in the early 1950s and Tsylia lives in Israel now. I don't remember Shulka going to the synagogue, but she always tried to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate holidays. Even in evacuation she fasted at Yom Kippur.

My mother's younger brother Gershl was born in 1895. Gershl and his wife Rukhl lived in Korosten. They didn't have any children, and when Shulka and her family lost their home my mother and father suggested that Uncle Gershl and Rukhl take Aron, Shulka and Itzyk's son, to raise him. He was their nephew.

They were wealthy – Gershl worked at a store and although the only education he got was at cheder Gershl was very good at making money. Gershl and Rukhl refused to adopt Aron and my mother couldn't forgive Gershl for this, even though she continued to keep in touch with them.

During World War II, Gershl and his wife were in evacuation. Gershl died in Malin in the early 1960s. Gershl observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays, although I wouldn't say he was a deeply religious person.

My mother was short, had dark eyes and hair, she was quick doing any work and could sing well. She had a teacher when she was a child and she could read and write in Yiddish.

My parents lived in my father's house after they got married. My father's brothers and sisters, Gersh, Rachel and Raitsa, lived in the same house – they were single at the time when my parents got married.

Life was miserable. When my older brother Leonid was born in 1922 my mother didn't even have milk to breastfeed him because she was starving. She dipped some bread in water, wrapped it in a piece of cloth and gave it to the baby to suck. The boy was very sickly: scrofulous and his body was covered with abscesses and boils.

When I was born on 11th July 1924 life was different. My father worked at the factory and my mother was a housewife. My father worked hard to make some money, but what we had was sufficient. We got new furniture in the house: a wooden wardrobe, cupboard and a sofa.

My mother said I had a babysitter: Maria – she was a German woman that came from a German colony [10] in the South.

In 1928 another girl was born to the family. She was named Lisa. Once my brother and I rocked her cradle hanging between our parents' beds so violently that she fell out of it. Lisa got inflammation of her brain and died. I remember my father's brother yelling at me and my brother Moshe, 'You killed her – such a nice beautiful baby that she was!', but our father and mother never said a word of reproach to us. My mother had no more children after Lisa.

My brother and I spent summers with my grandmother Khaya and grandfather Avrum in the village. My grandmother was constantly busy – working in the garden or feeding her livestock. They didn't keep an inn any longer, of course, but when somebody came to the village they came to grandfather Avrum and grandmother Khaika. My grandmother was a kind woman and people liked her.

I often went for walks with other girls in the village. They invited me to their homes where we had dumplings stuffed with potatoes or buckwheat and fried pork fat. My grandmother told me off for eating forbidden pork and pork fat, but I liked this food so much that I continued to keep my visits a secret from my grandmother.

On Saturday our parents arrived to bring me and my brother candy and cookies. Our parents didn't work on Saturday and came to have a festive dinner with our grandparents on Saturday.

In 1930 my grandmother fell ill and my mother took her and my grandfather Avrum to live with us in the town. At that time Gersh and his wife went to Birobidzhan [11] – many Jewish families went

there to establish the Jewish autonomous region.

A gypsy fortuneteller told my grandmother that she would die soon. My grandmother asked Gershl to come home to see her before she died. She met him and on the next day after his arrival she got worse. She died shortly afterward. I don't remember her funeral, because I was taken to our distant relatives.

Grandfather lived with us in Malin. He began every day from a prayer and went to the synagogue on Saturday. My mother also observed traditions. She knew prayers and could read in Hebrew. I remember carrying my grandfather's and my mother's prayer books to the synagogue on Saturday, since they were not allowed to carry things on Saturday.

There was a big and beautiful synagogue in Malin. In the middle of the 1930s it was closed and religious Jews were persecuted [12]. They closed Jewish bakeries where they baked matzah and didn't allow a minyan – gatherings of religious Jewish men. But still, we always had matzah at Pesach.

I remember my mother taking a big turkey to the shochet and he did something wrong and this turkey was not kosher. My mother cried bitterly – we led a modest life and my mother was sorry for such a loss, while my father hugged her and said, 'Just take it easy – we'll just pretend it is kosher meat.'

My father was a real atheist even though he wasn't a party member. He found Jewish traditions and holidays funny, but he loved his wife and took part in our celebrations. My mother fasted at Yom Kippur and I began to fast when I turned twelve. My favorite holiday was Chanukkah when adults gave children sweets and money.

In 1931 I went to a Jewish school. There were four schools in the town: three Ukrainian and one Jewish one. There were many children in the Jewish school while the Ukrainian schools were not so full. We studied mathematic, Ukrainian language, history, geography. The only difference from Ukrainian schools was that we studied in Yiddish. There were nice children in our school: children of Jewish workers and craftsmen, as well as of Jewish secretaries of the district and town party committees.

In 1932 the period of famine began [13]. My father went to get flour in Kiev and my mother baked bread to sell at the market. We went to the market together and I remember her weighing rations of bread on her scales. There were raids on trains – the authorities captured people if they found food products and declared them 'speculators' [people that made money reselling things for higher prices].

My father was on the train once when a raid began, but he managed to escape jumping off the train. He came home without bread or flour, but with his ribs broken. I remember my mother crying. He didn't go to Kiev again.

Once my mother gave me a piece of pie that she got somewhere. I bit on it greedily, but when I raised my eyes I saw my mother's hungry eyes. I offered her a piece, but she refused – she said she wasn't hungry. I was just a child and it didn't occur to me that my mother pretended she wasn't hungry to save more for me.

In 1936 my father died. The management of the factory where my father worked sent him to take a training course for managers in Kiev. In Kiev my father got sick from some food that he ate at a canteen. An ambulance took him to a hospital where he was left in the corridor and got no medical treatment. He died there.

My mother and uncle came to Kiev to take his body and they were told that my father was calling my mother's name before he died. There were hundreds of people at his funeral – my father's colleagues, neighbors and relatives. At home the rabbi said a prayer for my father and then the funeral was civil – his friends and colleagues made speeches. My father was buried in the Jewish cemetery.

After my father died my mother began to work even more than before. She bought piglets even though it was against religious laws to raise them for meat: she made sausage, ham etc. and sold her products at the market. However, she didn't eat pork. She prayed and celebrated Jewish holidays. I didn't pray, but I began to fast at Yom Kippur after my father died. I have never missed this fast ever since.

My mother's brother Gershl helped us. He brought products from Korosten and supported my mother with money. I often visited him in Korosten and Uncle Gershl and Rukhl always did their best to please me. They gave me money to go to the cinema or buy ice cream and tried to make me feel very much at home.

My brother Leonid studied in the same school where I went. He was very smart and he always tried to help our mother. At that time he preferred the company of other boys of his age and I had my own friends.

I found life beautiful, even though we were so poor. I was popular with my schoolmates: I was sociable and vivid. I was much liked for my singing. I sang Jewish and Ukrainian songs, Russian romances and even sang a popular Georgian song, 'Suliko.' I sang at amateur concerts on Soviet holidays. I was well known in town.

Once, at a performance dedicated to Taras Shevchenko [14], a great Ukrainian poet, after I sang a few Ukrainian songs, the audience asked me to sing 'Suliko.' The master of ceremony tried to explain that only Ukrainian songs were supposed to be sung at this performance, but the audience insisted.

After 'Suliko' I sang a few Jewish songs. The audience enjoyed my singing – many people in our town knew these songs. There was no anti-Semitism at that time and singing Jewish songs were as natural as singing Ukrainian songs. I enjoyed going to the parades on 1st May and 7th November [15]. After parades there was usually a big concert in the Center of culture where I usually took part.

In 1937 repression and arrests began [16]. I had a friend whose father was the director of the paper mill in Malin – he was arrested. Grinfeld, a party official and our neighbor, and many others were arrested. Our teacher of Ukrainian language, a nice and quiet man, was arrested, too. We stayed near the cell of imprisonment before the trial for hours to see him. We saw him at dawn, after a few days, when he was taken to a different place with some other prisoners. He looked exhausted and beaten up. Nobody ever saw him again.

Regardless of anything we were inspired by the ideas of socialism and communism. We believed everything that was published in newspapers and said on the radio, but what happened to our teacher shook our faith in the Soviet authorities – we knew him and couldn't believe that this man was an enemy. When I asked my mother whether what was published in newspapers was true, she kept silent and didn't answer my questions.

My brother finished school in 1939 and decided to become a cabinetmaker like uncle Gedali. My brother was not subject to recruitment to the army since he was the only breadwinner in the family.

The Great Patriotic War came as a surprise to all of us. I had finished the 9th grade and was going to visit my uncle Gersh in Korosten. On 22nd June 1941 the war was declared and on the next day my brother Leonid was recruited to the army.

In a week's time Korosten was bombed. Uncle Gersh, his wife Ruhl, her sister Riva and their nephews and nieces came to Malin in a horse-drawn carriage – they hoped that the war would soon be over and they would just stay with us for a few days.

On the next day after their arrival fascist bombers destroyed the railway station and all trains in Malin. A train with evacuated people from Western Ukraine was also bombed. Uncle Gersh came home in tears. He told us hundreds of people were killed and there were parts of human bodies scattered all around.

There were children from this train wandering about the town knocking on the doors of houses asking people to let them in. They lost their parents. Later director of our school gathered those kids together and they were evacuated.

The town was in panic. We ran to the river to hide under its steep banks and stayed there a whole night. We had a terrible feeling that Germans were already in town. Early in the morning Uncle Gersh harnessed the horses and left with his family.

After the railway station was bombed people began to escape from the town. Shymanovskiye, our neighbors, wanted us to join them to go away, but my mother firmly refused to leave. She was under the influence of older Jews that were saying that Germans would not harm anybody.

I did understand that we had to leave, however young I was, but my mother only smiled at me saying that everything would be all right. She didn't want to leave her home – she had a hard life and everything that she had was the result of hard work. I packed my small suitcase where I put some underwear and clothes and my ring and chain. She unpacked it saying, 'Look, I put your things back into the wardrobe.'

In a few days, when I was lifting a bucket of water from a well, Germans began a landing operation at the paper mill and started bombing the town. I ran to my aunt Shulka who lived nearby. She was making dumplings in her kitchen and her daughter Tsylia was helping her. I shouted, 'What are you doing – the Germans are already at the paper mill and you are making dumplings here?!' I helped my aunt to find her documents and the three of us went to my home to get my mother and grandfather.

My friend Ida, who was standing on the porch of her house, asked me, 'Tsylia, are you running away?' I told her that I was leaving that very moment because everything was going to explode and I told her to go with us. Ida refused and went into her house.

I grabbed my mother and grandfather by their hands and we ran down the street barefoot as we were. My grandfather could hardly walk and I kept pulling him begging him to try and go with us. Very soon Grandfather got tired, sat on the ground and begged us to leave him alone.

Some old people around began to shame us for putting an old man into such pain. They told us to leave him alone: 'Nobody would do him any harm - we would look after him.' We begged my grandfather to go with us, but he didn't move. My mother and I embraced him - we realized that we were not going to see him again.

We left the town and kept walking until night without stopping. Aunt Shulka and Tsylia were with us. When it got dark we knocked on the door of a house in the village asking the owners to let us stay overnight. In the morning some people from Malin told us that a bomb had destroyed our house and it burned down.

In the morning we got on our way and kept walking to the East. We walked holding on to the horse-drawn carts on which other Jews from Malin were riding. They never offered us to sit on a cart, and when we stopped exhausted they kept going to get rid of us since we were delaying them.

Ukrainian villagers came onto the road offering us bread and milk and offering us to get to their houses to rest. We ate what we were offered including pork and pork fat - nobody thought about kosher rules. We stayed for a night in a forest near the village of Ivankovo in Kiev region since the Germans were close and we were afraid to come to the village.

We came to the village holding to a cart with some people from Malin, but when we woke up they were not there. At that moment a Ukrainian woman and a boy from the village came to tell us that there were Germans in the village. She told us that the boy would take us to a place to go across the town.

There were retreating troops from the Soviet Union and horse-drawn carts with refugees. The crossing was bombed and it was next to impossible to get across the river. The army troops took the priority for crossing.

Many people that didn't want to leave their belongings were going back to their homes. Our neighbors Shymanovskiye also went back home and were brutally killed by Germans. My mother and Aunt Shulka went to the military and begged them to rescue us. The soldiers pulled all of us into the truck and we crossed the Dnieper with them.

We reached Kiev, having covered over 200 km in three weeks, at the end of July and we found an abandoned house on the outskirts of the city. We went in there to take a rest. We washed ourselves and took a rest. There were many such houses in Kiev.

There were clothes and shoes in the house, but we couldn't touch somebody else's belongings - we were afraid that the owners of the house came back and it would be too bad if they found their belongings missing. I picked worn out sandals from the floor and found a pair of old slippers for my

mother and a couple of kerchiefs – this was all we took.

We went to the railway station. It was like the end of the world there. Crowds of people pulling their bags and packs were trying to get on trains. We were holding hands with one another fearing to lose one another. It was a miracle that we got on the train. There was a big Jewish family with a lot of luggage: boxes, bales and suitcases. They occupied a whole railcar, closed the door and didn't let anyone else in.

We were starved and exhausted sitting in a corner of the railcar. We had some bread and sugar with us that we got from people on the way. Our fellow travelers were eating all the time – they had smoked chicken, meat, fish and bread, but they didn't offer us anything. Once I heard them talking about us saying, 'Where are those 'shlimazl' [crazy people] going – they may die on the way.'

However, when we reached the Ural they helped us to get on a train to Middle Asia. We reached Tashkent, which was some 3000 kilometers from our home. Our trip lasted for almost a month. The only food we had was dried bread and sometimes we got soup or cereal at stations.

My mother's cousin Milia Fridman lived in Tashkent. He visited us in Malin shortly before the war and left his address, but we didn't have it with us. We stayed at the evacuation department at the railway station where people were looking for their relatives.

At that time my father's brother Gershl was in hospital in Tashkent and was also looking for his family. He found us at the evacuation department. Gershl knew Milia's address. My mother and Tsylia went there, but he was at work and his wife Tsylia was not quite happy to see them. She even didn't offer them anything to eat, although my mother and Tsylia could hardly stand on their feet so starved they were.

Milia's wife offered them to lie down on some mattresses on the floor to wait until Milia was back from work. When he came home and saw my mother he began to cry and the three of them were sitting there crying. Milia told his wife off and gave my mother pillows, blankets, kitchen utensils, and soap and took my mother and Tsylia to the evacuation department. He didn't dare to offer my mother and Tsylia to stay in his house.

He promised them to help with getting some accommodation in Tashkent. But in a day he was recruited to the army and went to the front. Milia was wounded in his abdomen in his first battle and died in hospital. My uncle Gershl took us to the town of Yangiyul near Tashkent. We had to leave Tashkent since we needed a residence permit [17] to stay there.

We slept on the street straight near an aryk [artificial channel] in Yangiyul. In the morning Tsylia and I went to look for a job and my mother and Shulka stayed behind waiting for us.

Once an Uzbek man approached them asking their consent to marry me. I was a pretty girl and he said that I was going to be his first wife in his harem and he would give a big 'kalym' [redemption given to bride's parents]: carpets and sheep. My mother only laughed in response, she refused him, of course, since we found those outdated Middle Asian customs unacceptable.

There were numerous people in evacuation in Yangiyul. We met our acquaintances from Malin and they gave us shelter and helped me to find work. I worked at a rope factory. I had to work ten hours per day under the scorching sun. I got a bread coupon for 400 grams of bread per day.

Every morning I went to work crossing the river on a hanging bridge. One I was stopped by robbers. Their chief looked into my face and told his fellows to let me go. He said, 'She has no money.'

A room in the house where our friends lived got vacant. We moved in there. It was so small that only two of us could lie down there, but even this cage cost money. We put bricks on the floor, put dried grass over it and it served as a bed for my mother and me. Aunt Shulka and Tsylia stayed somewhere else. Tsylia was an accountant at the collective farm office [18].

Our neighbors from Malin took me to the office of a buttery asking them to employ me as an assistant accountant. At that moment Asia Moiseevna Aronova, a Jewish woman from Bukhara, supervisor of a dairy shop named 'The third Stalin's five year period' [19] was at the office. She looked at me and said that it was a shame that such a beauty had to starve or work with ropes and took my mother and me to her home. At first she said that we would live with her and help her about the house.

Asia Moiseyevna tried to convince my mother to let her adopt me from the first day of our stay with her. She probably intended to sell me to a rich Uzbek man to get a big 'kalym' for me. Her husband was at the front and every night she arranged parties for her friends. They partied until morning. She told me to sing and dance for them. Sometimes I almost fell from exhaustion and weakness and they threw me a piece of meat from 'plov' [rice with meat and spices - oriental dish] as if I were a pup.

She still wanted to convince my mother to give me away. To make us stay with her Asia took our passports and bread coupons. She only gave us a little bread for food. She locked the door to her house going to work. We looked after her baby the whole day and in the evenings I had to sing and dance for her guests.

There were many Jewish guests that knew Yiddish. Once I sang a Jewish song about a girl complaining about being hungry saying she was sorry for leaving her home. The Jews were moved and began to ask Asia to let us go. Bagir, her Uzbek lover, threatened her that he would leave her if she didn't let us free. Asia gave in to their petitions and put us out into the street giving us back our passports and bread coupons.

I returned to the rope factory where I was made a winder in a shop. This work was easier than what I did previously. We lived in the same small room for some time until we moved to Aunt Shulka and Tsylia in their brick house. Tsylia worked as an accountant in the office and a cleaning woman in a canteen. She got up at 4 o'clock in the morning to fetch water from a well. I got up with her to help her.

In 1943 I was mobilized to take a course of snipers. After finishing it we were taken to the range ground in the vicinity of the town. At that time my mother, who worked at the fruit drying facility, got ill. She ate fruit that she didn't wash and got an infection that resulted in peritonitis. A doctor that came to the hospital to provide consulting services saved my mother. After she had a surgery my mother was very weak. I was released from the school of snipers to take care of my mother.

Kiev was liberated in November 1944 and I began to work on obtaining permits for us to go back home. We were so happy to hear any news about liberation of the territory of our country. The war was crucial for people and for the country. The Germans brought so much suffering into our life.

We returned to Malin in spring 1945. There was a huge pit at the place where our house used to be. We were told that old Jews went to meet occupants with cakes and pies that their wives made. On the same day all Jews in Malin were taken out of town and killed. Germans killed our grandfather Avrum in the street. Ida, my friend and neighbor, also perished.

Our neighbors, the Shymanskiye family, who returned to Malin after they failed to cross the Dnipro river, also perished. Their daughter Polia, who was also my friend, was brutally raped and then fascists placed a bottle with a broken neck into her vagina and she bled to death. Her parents were killed along with other Jews.

We settled down with Aunt Shulka. We didn't hear from my brother Leonid. We didn't know whether he was alive or had perished. We wrote to Malin from Yangiyul and got a response saying that there was no information about him.

A few weeks after we returned Tsylia and I received a subpoena to come to the Party town committee. The secretary of the town committee declared to us that since we had no job the town committee decided to send us to restoration of the mines in Donbass. My mother and aunt Shulka were horrified; we were exhausted after evacuation and they couldn't imagine how we would leave home again.

In a few days we found work: Tsylia was an accountant at the public education office and I was employed as an assistant accountant at the post office. Once I was at work on one of my first days when all of a sudden a little bird flew into the window. An accountant, an older woman, said, 'Tsylia, you'll hear good news.' In about half an hour our distant relative came to tell me that Leonid was back. I ran all the way home to see my brother.

There was a bunch of people at home - our neighbors came to see him, too. Our friends and acquaintances came to greet us on Leonid's return. He was wounded and then shell-shocked at the front. In April 1945 he was demobilized and came to Malin.

Victory Day on 9th May 1945 [20] was a great day for us. We were more than happy to get home and be together. People came into the streets of the town singing, dancing, crying in joy of victory and sorrow of their losses. We looked into the future with hope.

In fall 1946 I was visiting my relatives in Korosten and my two friends and I went to a photo shop to have our picture taken. On the next day a young man came to the house where I was staying. He introduced himself: Natan Shapiro, director of an industrial association, and the photo shop was within the structure of this association. Natan and I began to see each other.

Natan came from a small village in Zhytomir region. He was born in 1918. His father died when Natan was a small boy. After finishing school Natan studied at the accounting school and became an accountant and then an auditor. After the war he became director of the industrial association within the system of military trade department.

He was an atheist and a Komsomol member [21]. He was going to become a member of the Communist Party. I didn't actually want to marry him. – He was handicapped – he was lame – and I didn't find him handsome. He was far from the man of my dreams – a tall handsome Mr. Right. But Natan didn't give up. When I left for Malin he began to write me nice and warm letters full of words of love.

At the end of December he came to Malin. He met my brother and mother and asked their consent to our marriage. My mother liked him a lot and she talked me into marrying a wealthy stable man like Natan.

On 31st December 1946 our relatives came to our wedding party. And on 1st January 1947 Natan and I went to Korosten. We had a civil ceremony. We didn't have a religious wedding. On that evening Natan's friends and relatives came to his home to celebrate our wedding.

My mother stayed in Malin and didn't want to leave the town even after Natan received a nice and comfortable apartment. My mother's argumentation was that she was a religious Jewish woman observing all Jewish traditions and celebrating holidays while we didn't observe any traditions at that time. We didn't even buy matzah, since Natan was already a party member and my mother reprimanded me for that.

My mother died in Korosten in 1969. She was buried in the Jewish corner of the town cemetery in Korosten.

My brother finished the College of Forestry in Malin after the war. It took him some time to get a job – it was the period of state anti-Semitism [22] and Jews were having problems with employment. My brother went to Minsk where he finished Construction College.

Leonid got married in Minsk and they had two children: Maya and Misha. Leonid and his family live in Los Angeles, America, now. My brother gave up Jewish traditions in the army. His family doesn't observe any Jewish traditions and mine doesn't either.

My mother was wrong to think that I was marrying a rich man. We lived a modest life in an old house with my husband's mother. We slept on plain nickel-plated beds. Natan was a very decent man and never allowed himself or others any misuse of authority or property.

He was the breadwinner in the family – I worked only every now and then due to my liver which I had problems with. My husband didn't want me to work much. So I rarely went to work and stayed at home most of the time taking care of my family.

I was far from any politics. When Stalin died I didn't cry or grieve like others – my family was more important than anything to me.

I wasn't really in love with my husband in the first years of my marriage while later I learned to value his kindness and noble character. He became a close friend of mine and I never regretted marrying him. Natan became particularly dear to me after our children were born. In 1947 our daughter Raissa was born and named after my father's sister Raitsa. In 1956 our son Igor was born.

We were a friendly family. My husband's colleagues often visited us. We celebrated Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November and 5th December – Constitution Day. From 1965 we began to

celebrate 9th May – Victory Day.

We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at that period of time. Only Natan's mother bought matzah at Pesach and cooked traditional Jewish food. This was the only holiday that we celebrated.

Our children studied well at school. After finishing school Raissa tried to enter the medical institute, but she didn't pass the exams successfully enough to get a sufficient number for admittance. It wasn't a surprise for us – the medical institute was a very popular educational establishment and for a Jew it was next to impossible to enter it. Raissa finished a medical school and became a very good medical nurse.

In the early 1970s Raissa married Igor Motylyov, a Jewish man from Lvov. She moved to her husband in Lvov. They were not happy in their marriage. Igor was a jealous man. Raissa was a beautiful woman and he made scenes and even beat her. They had two children: Pasha, born in 1972, and Sasha, born in 1977.

My husband and I wanted to move to Israel and wanted to take Raissa with us, but her husband didn't sign her a permit to go and didn't want to go himself. In 1980 my husband and I moved to Lvov. We exchanged our apartment for that location to be closer to Raissa and help and support her. My husband was still at work and I was a pensioner and began to help my daughter.

In a year's time Raissa came back from a resort in the Crimea and discovered enlarged lymph nodes in her breasts. She was diagnosed with lymphogranulomatosis and unfortunately, it turned out to be true. She was ill for six years and died in 1986.

Her older son Pavel is a programmer, and he and his wife live in Los Angeles, USA. Her younger son Pasha lives in Israel, in Haifa, he is manager and works for a company. They like their new life. Pasha has a son, Rayan, named after his mother, and Pasha has a daughter, Sopha. Our grandchildren write us and call on our birthdays. They invite me to visit them, but I can't afford the trip. However, we hope to see them one day.

My son Igor graduated from the Forestry Academy in Leningrad. He lived and worked in Korosten and then he moved to Lvov with us. He married Ira, a nice girl, in Lvov and they are very happy together. They have two children: son Sergey, 18 years old, and daughter Alyona, seven years old.

Although Ira is a Russian girl she observes Jewish traditions and is a volunteer at Hesed [23]. My granddaughter Alyona dances and sings in a Jewish children's concert group. Their group went on tour to Israel and Lena and Ira went there, too.

Perestroika [24] came as fresh wind for my husband and me. My husband wasn't a devoted communist and by that time he wasn't a party member any longer. Actually, he joined the Party to have no obstacles in his career. After he became a pensioner he lost his party membership certificate and never recalled it.

We are very enthusiastic about the possibilities for people to travel and chose a place of living. There is freedom of speech. It is good that people got to know about the tragedy of the Jewish people during the Great Patriotic War. There were books published that were not allowed before. The Jewish life has revived. Synagogues were opened and Jewish communities were established.

We can state proudly now that we are Jews.

My husband and I often attend Hesed – a car picks us up to take us to the Daytime Center. Hesed provides a lot of support and assistance to us. I stopped singing Jewish songs after my daughter died, but now I find myself smiling at concerts in Hesed.

We have friends in Hesed and we've come back to our historical sources: we celebrate all Jewish holidays, buy matzah and read Jewish newspapers. We even submitted our documents to go to Israel, but then we changed our mind because of the terrorism and unstable situation there. I wish we could move to Israel with our son's family.

Glossary:

[1] 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.

[2] 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.

[3] 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.

[4] Bolsheviks: Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevikize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-

wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

[5] Civil War (1918-1920): The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

[6] 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.

[7] Pogroms in Ukraine: In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

[8] Petliura, Simon (1879-1926): Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

[9] Greens: Members of the gang headed by Ataman Zeleniy (his nickname means 'green' in Russian).

[10] German colonists/colony: Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

[11] 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.

[12] 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.

[13] 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.

[14] Shevchenko T. G. (1814-1861): Ukrainian national poet and painter. His poems are an expression of love of the Ukraine, and sympathy with its people and their hard life. In his poetry Shevchenko stood up against the social and national oppression of his country. His painting initiated realism in Ukrainian art.

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

[16] 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.

[17] 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.

[18] 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.

[19] Five-year plan: Five-year plans of social and industrial development in the USSR an element of directive centralized planning, introduced into economy in 1928. There were twelve five-year

periods between 1929-90.

[20] Victory Day in Russia (9th May): National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

[21] Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread 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.

[22] 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.'

[23] 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 for 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.

[24] Perestroika (Russian for restructuring): Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

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