

# Grigoriy Kagan

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Kiev

Ukraine

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*Grigoriy Kagan surprised me all at once with his young looks, light movements and shrewd eyes. Grigoriy is tall and has a muscular athletic stature and gray hair cut short. Grigoriy moves around quickly and he is a very interesting conversationalist. About a year ago he bought a computer to be able to communicate with his sons and grandchildren by e-mail correspondence, but later he started studying the software. Grigoriy gave me a disc with Grigoriy's memories and the story of his life and the collection of stories 'Only pleasant memories'. Even the title describes his personality. I enjoyed reading his book: Grigoriy writes with a sense of humor and picks something funny even in the situation that another person would consider hard or sad. He also likes his dacha. He likes planting and taking care of his crops and enjoys talking about this. He lives in a 2-bedroom apartment in a 5-storied apartment building constructed in the 1970s in the Rusanovka district in Kiev. Rusanovka is also called the 'Venice of Kiev'. It stands on the bank of the Dnieper and there are channels running all across the area. Grigoriy and his wife Ludmila make a very sweet couple. Ludmila is a short tiny lady, always friendly and gentle. One can tell the husband and wife love and understand each other.*

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## **My family background**

I know very little about my father's family. My father Aron - Arl in Jewish - Kagan did not know much about them either. My grandfather's name was Mordekhai Kagan and my grandmother's name was Yura. I don't know my grandmother's maiden name or where they were born. They lived in Sovskaya Street in Demeyevka, a suburb of Kiev. Demeyevka was within the [Jewish] Pale of Settlement [1](#). My grandfather was a cabman and owned horses and wagons. My grandfather died in 1898, when my father turned 2. My grandmother Yura died in 1903. My grandfather and grandmother were buried in the Lukianovka Jewish cemetery [2](#) in Kiev. My father remained an orphan at the age of 7. He was the youngest in the family. I knew his three older brothers and two sisters. My father's sister Zelda Bykova was the oldest of all children. Her husband was a clerk and Zelda was a housewife. The next was my father's brother Yankl Kagan. He was a cabman. He was much older than my father: Yankl's children were the same age with my father. Yankl had a house,

stables and wagons in Sovskaya Street. Horses made the main means of transportation in those years. The next child in the family was Iosif. He was a blacksmith. He had a forge near his house. The third brother Moishe also dealt in the transportation business. My father's sister Haya was born in 1895.

After my grandfather and grandmother died my father went to live with Yankl and his wife Perl, and Haya lived with Iosif. In winter and summer my father lived at the hayloft. When my father grew older, Yankl trained him in his business, and later his brother Iosif trained him his vocation and before getting married my father worked in Iosif's forge.

My father's mother tongue was Yiddish. I think the only place my father's brothers studied was cheder. My father studied in the cheder for two years, but he did not finish it. He could write a little and knew only one arithmetic action: addition. My father and his brothers were religious. When they were growing up, the community only acknowledged religious way of life, and different views were not appreciated.

In 1918 my father married Doba Braginskaya, a cheerful girl from the nearby Romanovka village. I don't know how my parents met. Their marriage may have been prearranged that was quite common at their time. I think my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding.

My grandfather Gersh Braginskiy had died before I was born. My grandmother's name was Mara Braginskaya, but I don't know her maiden name. I don't know what my grandfather did for living.

They had five children: four daughters and one son. His name was Boruch. The oldest daughter's name was Shyfra. Malka and Boruch came after her. My mother Doba was born in 1900. My mother's sister Elka was the youngest.

My mother's family spoke Yiddish. They also spoke Russian and Ukrainian with their non-Jewish neighbors. Romanovka was a Ukrainian village where few Jewish families resided. I've never been in Romanovka. When I was born, my mother's family lived in Kiev. The Pale of Settlement was cancelled in 1917 [Russian Revolution of 1917] [3](#), and numbers of Jewish families living in Kiev region started moving to Kiev. Only my grandfather Gersh's grave remained in Romanovka. Mama hardly told me anything about her family and I don't know how religious they were.

My mother's sister Shyfra and her husband moved to the USA in 1923. I was 3 years old, and my parents and I went to say good bye to them. I was put on a stool to kiss my aunt and uncle. This is all information I have about them. We had no contacts with them. In the late 1920s the authorities had a suspicious attitude to those, who had relatives abroad and corresponded with them [Keep in touch with relatives abroad] [4](#). They might accuse people of espionage without any reason. Mama received few letters from Shyfra, but she did not reply and the correspondence terminates. My mother's sister Malka married Elia Elman, a Jewish guy, who had moved to Kiev from a small nearby village. Elia worked as a foreman at a furniture factory and Malka was a housewife. They had six children: 3 daughters: Ida, a middle daughter, whose name I can't remember, and Anna, and three sons: Fitel, Grisha, who was older than me, and Pyotr, the youngest, born in 1921. Elia was a convinced communist and atheist, of course, since the Bolsheviks and the Soviet regime had an intolerant attitude toward religion [struggled against religion] [5](#) calling it delusion. A communist could not be religious by definition. The Elman family observed no Jewish traditions. Elia did not allow having his sons circumcised. He did not acknowledge religious rituals. By the way, this served

his youngest son well. During the Great Patriotic War [6](#) Pyotr was recruited to the army, and his military unit was encircled. They were captured by Germans, who could not ignore Pyotr's Semitic appearance, of course. The Germans asked his name and Pyotr replied he was Ukrainian and his surname was Vasilenko. This was his older sister Ida husband's surname. The Germans ordered him to take his pants down and were surprised to see that he was not circumcised. This was probably one of just few cases, when the communist ideas had served anybody well. My mother's sister Elka, who had the Russian name [7](#) of Olga, lived near the Vladimirskiy market in Kiev. Her family name was Gershtein. Her husband's name was Elia. Elia worked at a pant and Olga was a housewife. Their son Israel was born in 1932. My mother's brother Boris Braginskiy got fond of revolutionary ideas and got actively involved in the revolution. After moving to Kiev he went to work in the party bodies and by the 1930s he became some high official in Kiev. Boris married Alla, a Jewish woman, some time in 1934, they had no children. My grandmother lived with him after moving to Kiev, and later she moved to a one-bedroom apartment in Proreznaya Street in the center of Kiev. Of my mother's whole family that I knew only my grandmother, my mother and her sister Olga were moderately religious. They celebrated the main Jewish holidays at home. The rest of the family was atheist.

My father bought horses and a wagon to work on his own before getting married. He also somehow managed to get a 2-bedroom apartment on the 2nd floor of a 2-storied mansion in the center of Kiev. My parents had their bedroom in a smaller room, and the bigger room served as the children's room. There was also a kitchen. I was born in this house in 1920. I was named Grigoriy after my mother's father and my Jewish name is Gersh. My sister was born in 1922. Mama wanted to name her Yura after my father's mother. However, when she went to register the little girl at the civil registry office, the registrar refused to write down this name (the Russian name of Yura is affectionate from the man's name of Yuri). For this reason my sister was registered as Yulia.

When my sister was 2 and I was 4, an incident decided my future. Mama went out leaving my sister and me sitting on the window sill for us to look out of the window. Yulia, seeing our mother approaching the house pushed the window and fell out of it. Mama grabbed her and ran to the 'Milk drop' clinic across the street. Leiba Rabinovich, an old Jew and director of this clinic, examined the girl and said she was perfectly all right. When she was falling, her blouse puffed up like a parachute softening her fall down. This was when I decided to become a parachutist when I grew up.

I cannot say my parents were strongly religious. My father often worked on Saturday. We did not celebrate Sabbath. My father went to the small one-storied nearby synagogue in Bolshaya Vasilkovskaya Street on the main Jewish holidays. He took me with him after I turned five. The building of the synagogue was removed in the 1930s. I remember celebration of Pesach in our family. There was no bread in our house through 8 days of Pesach and we only ate matzah. Mama cooked delicious food: chicken broth, stuffed fish, chicken neck filled with liver and strudels. In the evening we sat at the table and my father recited a prayer. We also celebrated other Jewish holidays as well, but I don't remember any details. My parents spoke Yiddish and Russian at home and I spoke both languages well.

In 1926 the authorities forced us out of our apartment. They needed the mansion for some reason, and forced all tenants out. There was another 2-storied building nearby. The owner of the house was selling apartments in the house for a very low price. Another part of the building had housed a restaurant before. The restaurant had been damaged by fire. There were two apartments on each

floor: one 2- and one 3-bedroom apartment. My father and his brother Moishe bought 3-bedroom apartments on different floors: my father bought one on the 1st floor, and Moishe bought one on the 2nd floor. There were no comforts in the house. 2 houses away from our house water was sold in buckets in a small booth. There was a toilet in the yard. The apartments were heated with stoves. My mother cooked on the Russian stove [8](#) in the kitchen. There were sheds in the big backyard where my father and uncle Moishe arranged stables. My father had two pairs of draft horses and wagons. This house was removed in the mid 1960s. However, we didn't live there long. The local authorities took a decision to make a food store in our apartment and we were ordered to move out. My parents rented a small room on the corner of Sovskaya Street and Kladbischenskiy Lane. There was a cemetery nearby, it was a common town cemetery and I don't think there was a name of it. and I remember the numerous funeral processions. Later this cemetery was closed and a general education school built on the site. My sister studied in this school later. We lived in the Kladbischenskiy Lane for a little over a year before my father made arrangements with the tenants of the 2-bedroom apartment on the 1st floor of our previous house: he bought them another dwelling and we moved into their apartment. My father fenced the yard.

## Growing up

When I turned five, my parents decided it was time for me to start my studies. It was common for Jewish children to go to study at the age of 5. I don't know the reason, but at least all our relatives and friends sent their children to study at the age of 5. However, I could not go to school before turning 8 years of age, which was a rule, at that time children went to school at the age of 8 according to Soviet standards, but my parents arranged with the teacher to give me classes at home. Within three years I attained the knowledge corresponding to the syllabus of 3 grades of general education school. I turned 8 in 1928 and my mother and I went to the nearby 7-year Ukrainian school. It was a small 2-storied building. Its director told mama that there was an order issued by the people's commissar of education for Jewish children to study in Jewish schools, Russian children in Russian schools and Ukrainian children in Ukrainian schools. He refused to admit me to the 1st grade. Mama asked him whether it was possible for me to go to the 2nd grade. Since the order was issued in 1928 it did not refer to pupils of the 2nd grade. I was given an entrance test: the teacher of mathematic wrote a problem on the blackboard during a break at school and I resolved it instantly. I was admitted to the 2nd grade. My classmates were one year older than me. They were born in 1919. However, I was the best pupil in my class. I was one of the first to become a pioneer [All-Union pioneer organization] [9](#) in my class, though I was the youngest. I was elected chairman of the pioneer unit in my class and then chairman of the pupils' committee at school. There were few other Jewish children in my class. There was no anti-Semitism. There was no national segregation in my school.

I had many chores at home. My father got up very early. He had his horses harnessed before 5 o'clock in the morning to go to work. He hauled beer, sweets, sugar and he did the loading himself to save his earnings. He returned home by 5 p.m. and was exhausted after a day's work. Mama and I were waiting for him at the gate. I opened the gate and unharnessed the horses. Mama had a bucket of water for my father to wash himself. I was to feed the horses, give them oats or hay, give them water and clean them an hour and a half later. I was to take care of the horses. Occasionally I took the horses to a vet. I rode one horse and led another holding it by the bridle. I had to stand in line to the vet and these visits might last a day or so. I always smelled of horses. Once Pyotr

Shebiakin, with whom I shared my desk in my class, said that I smelled of horse manure. I hit him. The teacher asked what the matter was and when I explained she told Pyotr to go out of the classroom and told me that I was right. I can still remember this.

1932-33 was the period of terrible famine in Ukraine [10](#). The food store arranged in our 3-bedroom apartment on the 1st floor turned out to be very helpful. People had to stand in lines at night to get some bread. The shop assistants used to come by our apartment to heat or cook some food in our kitchen during their lunch time. They did it since we moved into the house. Thanks to this we did not have to stand in long lines. The shop assistants brought us bread and mama gave them our bread coupons. We somehow managed through this hard time.

There was a club and a gymnasium in the basement of the house where I had been born. When I was in the 5th grade, I enrolled into a wrestling club. When I told my father in the evening, he said I was a fool, and on the following day I enrolled in a box club. My father didn't mind it, though he did not quite like the idea. Having attained numerous bruises and bumps, I was soon awarded a junior category, and before finishing the 7th grade at school I already had the 3rd grade in boxing. This helped me to enter a military school later. Boxing was not my single hobby. I went to the radio station the moment I heard there was one, established by Ierehim Tolochinskiy, a smart and keen Jewish guy. We studied the Morse receipt and transmission. It didn't take me long to learn it. Ierehim sent me to the short wave class on the corner of current Kreschatik and Institutskaya Street. My trainer was Aaronov, unfortunately, I cannot remember his first name. I learned the Morse code receipt and transmission promptly. Over a year later in 1936 I became a skilled radio operator. This became the main course of my life. It determined my future career success. In 1936 I returned to Ierehim's radio station, but this time I became an operator. The call letter of the radio station was UK5KJ, and I was assigned a personal international call letter: ORS 1030. There was an operator work schedule. I was to take up the shift, sign up in the roster and work 2-3 hours before the next shift man came. This short-wave transmission hobby spread all over the world at that time. I sent messages and someone responded. I corresponded with many people. To confirm our communication my partners were supposed to send me their QSL-cards and I sent them mine. Once I established communication with a radio amateur, whose call letter was W2KK. 'W' stood for America! This was the first time I contacted someone from so far away. He sent me his QSL-card, and before sending him mine I boasted to Ierehim of this contact with America. He told me not to send him my card and never show his to anybody since this was a direct path to the GULAG [11](#) in Kolyma. This occurred in 1936, during the period of arrests [Great Terror] [12](#). Later I understood that Ierehim saved my life giving his advice, but at that time I was rather upset that nobody would ever hear about my accomplishment.

After finishing the lower secondary school I had to go on with my studies. I was admitted to the 8th grade of a Russian school. Russian was no problem for me. I joined Komsomol [13](#) in the 8th grade. I wouldn't say I made my parents happy with my successes at school. The radio station was what I dedicated most of my time to. After classes I went to my club and returned home before my father was to come home. My classmates went to the cinema or theater and met with their girlfriends while I spent my time sitting by the radio transmitter sending my call letter on the air. I finished school in 1937.

Every day newspapers and radio published about new arrests and discovering new 'enemies of the people' [14](#). My friends and I admired Yezhov [15](#) and those decisive efforts he undertook to discover



and eliminate enemies of the people and enemies of the Soviet power. Of course, my friends and I believed it all, being Komsomol members. How could we doubt the Communist Party and Stalin's decisions! When my mother's brother Boris Braginskiy was arrested, I started having doubts about what was happening. I knew and admired him since my childhood. He was a wonderful person. We didn't see him often: he was a high official and did not have much in common with an ordinary cabman's family. Boris and his wife Alla visited us occasionally. Once he told me that Trotskiy [16](#) was a great man. I never mentioned it to anybody since we had this discussion after Stalin deported Trotskiy from the USSR. Boris may have spoken it out elsewhere. He was arrested, prosecuted for being a Trotskyist and enemy of the people and executed in August 1936. Grandmother Mara died few days after her son was executed. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Kiev. I don't know where Boris' grave is. I don't know what happened to Alla after Boris was killed.

I finished the 10th grade in 1937. I did not have the highest marks in my certificate and knew that I hardly had a chance to enter a college and decided to go to a military school. I went to Kharkov [440 km from Kiev] where I entered the Kharkov Air Force School of Communications. There were two companies in this school: one trained radio operators for landing troops and another company trained operators for Air Force troops. I became the best cadet at this school. While the other cadets were just beginners of studying the Morse code, I was already the 1st class operator. The 1st class radio operator can receive and transmit at least 80 signs, a 2nd class operator can operate 60 and a 3rd class operator can operate 40 signs per minute. We had Morse code classes every day. Our classes started after we had breakfast. In class my trainer gave me a transmission task while the others were receiving what I transmitted. We also studied self-defense and jumped with parachutes. It's not true that one can get used to everything. I remember the feeling of fear before my first jump, but the following ones were even more fearful, when the door opened and I looked down... I never got used to this, though I jumped a number of times. Perhaps, the feeling of fear is natural, and it is important to overcome it.

I finished this school with honors. In August 1939 I was awarded the rank of lieutenant and was assigned to serve in Engels town [800 km from Moscow] near Saratov in Povolzhiye populated with German colonists [17](#). My Yiddish helped me to communicate with them. I served in the 202nd airborne landing brigade. About one month later my headquarters informed me that the 64th howitzer artillery regiment in Saratov needed communication officer and I was sent to Saratov. I became communication commanding officer at the age of 20. Afanasiy Zaborskiy, commanding officer of a howitzer squad, became my best friend. Howitzers have short barrels, which makes them different from cannons. 3 pairs of horses had to pull one 152-mm howitzer. Once one Afanasiy's howitzer flunked into snow. I tried to help them pull it out of there. It resulted in hernia and I had a surgery. I stayed in hospital for few days before I was released. However, I could not lift weights and was not fit for combatant service. I decided to enter the Military Academy. This was in 1940. The regiment commander approved my application. I took entrance exams in the regiment headquarters in Kuibyshev [present Samara, about 1200 km from Moscow]. I passed mathematic and physics and was to take the Russian language exam. There were few subjects given at the exam and I chose the subject of Mayakovskiy [18](#), whom I liked and knew well. I wrote an excellent composition with multiple quotations. Then we gathered in the conference hall to hear the results, when the teacher of the Russian language and literature, who happened to be the wife of a big commander asked, who lieutenant Kagan was. When I stood up, she said I had written an excellent

composition, and even the excellent mark was not enough to give for it. They confirmed my admission to the Leningrad Academy. It was called the Military Electrotechnical Academy of Communication. After the war it was renamed into the Academy of Communication. In September 1940 I started my studies in the Academy. We lived in barracks. On Sunday cadets had a day off and were allowed to walk in the city. I went to museums and theaters. Leningrad [called St. Petersburg today] is a wonderfully beautiful city. One day I met Masha, Maria Akimova on a tram stop. After the war she became my wife and the mother of our two sons.

### **During the war**

In June 1941 I finished my first academic year in the Academy. I was eager to visit my parents on vacation, and we were surprised to hear that we were supposed to stay in the Academy after exams. My distant relative living in Leningrad invited me to the opening of fountains in Petergof [Petergof or Peterhof - a palace, fountain and park ensemble built by Peter the Great in the early 1700s, often called the 'Russian Versailles' and 'Capital of Fountains', is situated 30 km from Saint Petersburg. The fountains operate during the summer.] on 22nd June 1941. We went to Petergof and were walking around, when a military patrol approached me and ordered to go back to my military unit. I was bewildered: I had a leave and observed the rules so there seemed to be no reason for me to be notified like this. Another patrol repeated this requirement. I went to the station to take a local train and that was where I heard that the Great Patriotic War began. However, people had a rather optimistic attitude we had been convinced that if somebody attacked us, the war would be instant and we would defeat the enemy on its own territory. This was a common belief. The vacation was cancelled and we started having classes in the Academy again. Then there was an order to form the 11th special infantry brigade from cadets issued. I was appointed commanding officer of a squad. We were given no weapons, but some digging tools. We marched to the front line in the south of Leningrad. A company commanding officer, my fellow cadet at the Academy, marched beside me and I asked him why we had no weapons. He silently unbuttoned his empty holster. He didn't even have a gun. When we arrived at Ust'-Izhora, we dug trenches. I started training my subordinates self-defense methods, when we received another order. It stated that all Academy cadets had to go back to Leningrad. When our replacement forces arrived, I transferred command to another lieutenant and we went back to Leningrad to continue our studies. And then the siege of Leningrad [Blockade of Leningrad] [19](#) began. This was when I learned what starving was like. We, strong guys, received small pieces of bread per day. We ate our ration at once and then had nothing to eat until the following morning. Then we got an order for the Academy to relocate to Tomsk [3000 km east from Moscow in Siberia]. The planes delivering food products to Leningrad transported us from Leningrad. On our way to the evacuation we got a little encouraged. After two months in Tomsk we were notified that we would have an accelerated graduation to have the right to finish the Academy after the war. I was one of the first 5 graduates of the Academy.

In 1942 I submitted my request for joining the Communist Party. This was my sincere step. I believed the party consolidated the best part of society. This was the way my generation was raised. I became a candidate for the Party membership. I received my party membership certificate in early 1943. It was a big honor for me. Later, in my peaceful life, it turned out that this party membership was also important for making a career, but I did not give this a thought at that time. I was not looking for any personal benefits.

In March 1942 we were awarded the rank of lieutenants and took a train to Moscow to the Communication Headquarters of the army. I was assigned to the 99th Guard tank brigade as communication commanding officer. However, before I could make my appearance at the point of destination, the Communication Headquarters human resource officer took back my assignment notice. I asked him what happened and he explained that commander of the Air Force communications General Vasiliev requested that I was assigned to his unit. General Vasiliev was deputy chief of Kharkov School and knew me well. He appointed me chief of the radio center of the Air Force headquarters located in Moscow. My subordinates were the girls, who volunteered to be radio operators. We received ciphered cables and I submitted them to the headquarters. One month later General Vasiliev notified me that the radio operator of the 4th Air Force Corps under the command of General Kazankin deployed in the German rear near Smolensk perished from an antipersonnel mine. Vasiliev asked me whether I wanted to go there as a radio operator. I was very surprised that my general asked my consent rather than issuing an order to me. I agreed to go. I took a plane with two soldiers. I was given two parachutes and they had one each. One of them had a receiver on his chest and another had a dynamo machine (we called it a 'soldier engine' since it had a handle generating power by continuous turning of this handle). It was necessary since batteries were only sufficient to support the receipt, but not transmission. We flew at night. In landing troops their commander is person number one, and number two is the radio operator receiving directions of the headquarters and hands them to the commander. These were ciphered messages and I was the only person, who knew the content. The deployment of our landing troops in the German rear was very dangerous for them. Our 6 brigades were well-trained paratroopers, and we caused severe damages in the enemy's rear. On 6th May 1942 I received another cipher message from Moscow. It was a direction for us to leave the site of our deployment. My brigade and I relocated to Ramenskoye. Our brigade commander Colonel Rodimtsev, who was promoted to general soon, thought high of me, but I did not stay in his brigade. General Vasiliev ordered me to come to his office in Moscow and sent me to Teykovo town where I was appointed communication chief of the 4th maneuver airborne landing brigade. I had to train its radio operators. Commander of this brigade was Colonel Zhelo drank at least one liter of vodka per day and was never sober. He was a partisan before he was appointed commander of the brigade, but this appointment was cancelled before long. Our new brigade commander was Lieutenant Colonel Nikolay Dvornikov, a highly-skilled parachutist, who had over 200 parachute jumps. He was an idol for me: I had over 50 jumps by then. I arrived at the brigade in the rank of captain, and I was appointed assistant chief of communication of the brigade. Chief of communication, a major, was a stupid person having no idea of our area of responsibility. He was concerned that I when I was promoted to the rank of major, this would jeopardize his position, and this conviction of his postponed my promotion to this rank. I wasn't promoted to the rank of major until I was back in the Academy after the war.

The 4th maneuver airborne landing brigade and the 6th brigade were merged to form the 10th guard airborne landing brigade. After it recaptured Krivoy Rog [370 km south-east of Kiev] was awarded the name of the Krivoy Rog Red Banner Airborne Landing Division, but then we were on the front-line in the north making efforts to recapture Staraya Russa [about 800 km east of Kiev]. Redia was ahead of us. We were fighting on the 12-km front line that was transferred to us by the previous division by an acceptance deed. There was a village in this area, and the deed indicated that it was liberated from Germans, but this was not true. Vasiliy Ivanov, commander of the division, issued an order: 'Well, parachutist guys, seize this village!' This happened on 4th May 1943. I remember this date well. A group of parachutists started on their way to the village at



night. They also had mine engineers with them to remove mines to make passages to the village. They stabbed all Germans in their trenches at night. The Germans did not know what happened till their guys called their headquarters and heard cursing in Russian. The Germans sent a battalion to recapture the village, but our paratroopers already had additional forces sent to them. Our commander was the lieutenant colonel, deputy commander of the regiment. He was in one blindage and I was in another with my radio station. Our wounded troopers were taken to my blindage. I told them to stay calm since no cannon was going to hit our blindage. Why did I tell this? Because a gypsy fortune-teller had told me that my wife would kill me, and I was not even married yet. This called them down, and they only asked me to stay with them. I looked out of the blindage and saw a column of Germans moving toward us. They were coming slowly, but they were still moving in our direction. I tuned the radio station to a 'Katyusha' division [editor's note: The 82mm BM-8 and 132mm BM-13 Katyusha rocket launchers were built and fielded by the Soviet Union in World War II. The launcher got this unofficial, but immediately recognized in the Red Army, name from the title of a Russian wartime song, Katyusha] and notified them that a German division was openly moving in my direction. The communication officer of this division recognized me and said: 'We shall play a merry song now'. There were 32 units in the 'Katyusha' division and they all started firing. The German battalion was gone. The 'Katyusha' units made a fearful weapon. It was tested in 1942, when Germans wanted to capture Moscow. Well, anyway, I had to run to the division commander's blindage to deliver the messages to him. At one moment a German sniper started shooting at me. I fell onto the ground thinking what I could do. I crawled about 15 meters aside across the dirt, before I stood up and ran. I managed to escape. There were long and hard fights near Staraya Russa, and we had to retreat incurring losses. I lost many friends there. We almost lost the division. There were just few survivors.

The remains of our division relocated to Kharkov [450 km east of Kiev] for remanning. There were 7 echelon trains with 5 of them transporting cannons. After remanning and reequipment near Kharkov we were sent to cross the Dnieper River in October 1943. We started crossing the river on 8th October 1943. Our infantry went first followed by our landing division and parachutists, when our Army Commander ordered the parachutists to go first. There was an island on the Dnieper that we could use. The Germans used Ferdinand cannons [new German heavy self-propelled gun nicknamed 'Ferdinand' after it's creator, Ferdinand Porsche] with thick armor. My division commander sent me to the observation point on a hill. Our artillery people installed a 45-mm cannon to shoot at this Ferdinand cannon, but it didn't work. The Ferdinand cannon fired back and destroyed our cannon. Its crew perished, and a splinter injured my head. My orderly pulled me to the crossing. I had a bandage applied on my injury and transported me to the left bank of the Dnieper on a raft. Our medical battalion was already there. The surgeon examined my wound and told Major Vasilij Pokrovskiy, chief of the sanitary service of the division, that I had to be taken to a rear hospital. Pokrovskiy replied: 'No hospitals! There are many captains in hospitals, but we have only one Grigoriy'. I could never forget this. I was taken to a house in Perevolochnaya village. I stayed in bed and medical nurses came to replace my bandages, give me medications and food. 10 days later Pokrovskiy said: 'Enough of staying in bed'. I had another bandage replaced and was ordered to cross the river to the opposite bank. My fellow comrades joked that I had to cover the bandage or they might draw attention of Germans. After crossing the Dnieper we moved in the direction of Krivoy Rog. That was when I was awarded the first order. General Ivanov, commander of the division, declared that I deserved an Order of the Red Combat Banner [20](#) for being wounded, but staying in the formation. He sent the documents for review and meanwhile we relocated to

another front line and I had no chance to receive the award. My commander unpinned his order of Red Banner [Order of the Red Star ] [21](#) and handed it to me. This was my first combatant order.

I always stood beside my division commander. We developed good relationships. In December 1943 we started preparations for our attack on Krivoy Rog. The division advanced, and the paratroopers, communications people and the headquarters stayed behind. A tank leader left his tank with us and went back to his unit. I asked him to show me how to start the tank. My division commander and I were alone, when German troops approached closer. I suggested that we drove the tank. I started the engine and we drove to Pervomayskoye near Krivoy Rog. There were Katyusha units on the bank of the Dnieper. The army commander was preparing for an attack. Germans feared Katyusha units a lot. They played an important role in the liberation of Krivoy Rog. The Katyusha units smashed German troops from their positions. We liberated Krivoy Rog by 23rd February 1944, the Soviet Army Day [22](#). My friend colonel Nikolay Dvornikov perished there. The infantry was deployed ahead of us. Landing troops were always behind on the front line. The 24th paratrooper regiment that was under command of Dvornikov, was behind an infantry regiment that consisted mainly of the Kazakh troopers, who did not understand a word in Russian. They were miserable fighters and ran away hearing the first shots. It was the same that time. Therefore, the 24th paratrooper regiment deployed in the echelon of our division at some distance from the front line did not expect this prompt advance of German troops and was encircled. Nikolay Dvornikov perished repulsing an attack. A street in Krivoy Rog was named after him. Later we resumed our position and seized the town, but the deceased ones were lost forever. Many things happened.... There were also communication problems. The division had to relocate about 15 km from our position. Our chief of communication ordered to install the line of communication. Why did we have to do this, when we were on the go? We had to save the cable. So, we were installing the cable, when we ran out of it. The regiments entered Pervomayskoye village, when the communication was lost. Then we received additional quantities of cable from American supplies: big rolls of 1.5-2 km cable lengths. My people were still behind. What was I to do to establish the communication? I went to the nearest hut where I discovered three guys. We knew there were young guys in all villages who were hiding from being regimented to the front line. When they saw me, they got scared that I might kill them, but I explained that I would do them no harm if they helped me to install the cable. They ran ahead installing the cable and I followed them with my gun. We established the communication promptly. My commander was greatly surprised that I managed it so well. I was awarded a II Grade Order of the Great Patriotic War [23](#) for my participation in the liberation of Krivoy Rog.

When Krivoy Rog was liberated, all parachutists who had experienced over 50 jumps were directed to relocate to Moscow for another formation of paratroopers. Our division was renamed into an infantry division after all parachutists left it. I had over 100 jumps and went to Moscow. I was appointed chief of communication of the 3rd Guard paratrooper brigade in Teykovo [200 km north-east of Moscow]. The brigade was based in a forest few km from the town. There was a field for training parachute jumps nearby. The jumps were performed from a gondola where 3 parachutists and one instructor could fit. A powerful winch was lifting and lowering the gondola. I was to take part in the training. I additionally received 100 rubles more for each training jump. Besides personal training, I also trained beginner parachutists. There were the first women parachutists involved in the training and they happened to have more courage than men. There were few girls in my paratrooper brigade and they never waited for being pushed to jump. On the contrary, they

always asked the instructor to let them take the first jump, the so-called 'zeroing in', when an instructor fixed the spot where the first parachutist landed. It was different with the guys. I happened to have to push a parachutist. I also had to tie myself inside to not be pulled out by a parachutist. In early 1944 I and other paratroopers relocated to Bykhov [450 km south-west of Moscow] in Belarus where we were to form the 103rd paratrooper division. I was appointed chief of communication in the 3rd paratrooper brigade within this division.

I kept in touch with my family through these years. In 1941, when I was a cadet of the Academy, I sent my parents a letter writing them to have no concerns about the war since we would defeat them in no time. Fortunately, my father, who had little education, happened to be smarter than me. He didn't wait till our brave army would defeat the enemy. He harnessed the horses and my mother, my sister and my father headed to the east. He tried to convince his older sister Zelda to join them, but Zelda and her husband refused. They said they were too old to leave home. They were killed on 29th September 1941 in Babi Yar [24](#). My family arrived at a town on the bank of the Dnieper where the army expropriated their wagon and horses and they took a train to Uzbekistan. They arrived at and stayed in Margelan near Fergana. They returned home after the liberation of Kiev in 1944. My father's brother Meishe, his wife Basia, their daughters Mara and Sophia also returned to Kiev from evacuation, they were in Central Asia. Meishe's apartment was vacant, but some people had moved in my parents' apartment. They refused to move out of it. My parents wrote me about it. I was in Bykhov. My commandment sent me and 10 soldiers to Kiev to help my parents and we also trained installation of long-distance communication. We came to our house and I demanded that the tenants moved out of my parents' apartment. They refused and I ordered the soldiers to take their belongings outside. One of the tenants started threatening me and I explained that I was a paratrooper and they had better obey. I helped my parents to move back into our apartment. The previous tenants appealed to court, but it did not work. I returned to my unit. When the formation and training were over I went to the front line again. We cheered up. We were advancing smashing the German forces. There was the feeling of close victory. We were heading to Germany. Our division was involved in the liberation of Vienna. In early May 1945 we stopped in a small village near Vienna, unfortunately, I forgot its name. Our paratrooper forces were in the 2nd echelon. The village was lovely and we enjoyed the quietude and calmness. On 8th May 1945 we got together for a division meeting, when our division commissar came in and declared: 'Guys, the war is over!' We rushed outside and started shooting into the air. The commissar allowed us some time to express our cheers before he announced that the war was over for all, but for us. There was still action in process in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Stalin issued an order: 'Tank brigades and paratrooper forces, go ahead to Czechoslovakia to rescue it from German forces'. We relocated there immediately. We separated, when we arrived in Czechoslovakia: one part moved in the direction of Prague, and we headed to Ceske Budejovice. We were merciless towards German troops. We exterminated all of them: taking captives was out of the question. The war was over for our division 24 km from Ceske Budejovice. I was awarded another order of Red Banner for Vienna. I received my 4th order in 1965, to the 20th anniversary of the victory over Germany. I was invited to the military registry office and awarded an order of the Patriotic War Grade I.

I also corresponded with Maria Akimova. Maria came from a small village near Smolensk, I don't remember its name. Her parents Pyotr Akimov and Aksinia gave birth to four children. Aria had to take care of her younger sisters and brother, being the oldest in the family. They perished during

the Great Patriotic War. After finishing secondary school Maria went to her aunt in Leningrad. Maria was a siege survivor. We decided to get married after the war. I went to see her and we registered our marriage in a registry office. Of course, we had no wedding party considering the circumstances. I was allowed a few days' leave to spend with my wife and then I returned to my division. My parents had nothing against my marriage with a non-Jewish woman. They thought that our love was what mattered.

By the end of the war I was chief of communication of the 114th division where I was transferred from the position of the 103rd division battalion chief of communication. I did not face any anti-Semitism in the army. I don't think there was any. I was treated with love and respect like other Jews in the army. I think that in extreme situations insignificant things move to the background, and personal values come into focus.

### **After the war**

I was going to resume my studies in the Academy. Before going to the front line we obtained certificates that we were cadets of the Academy and could return there after the war. However, our division General Vasiliy Ivanov received an order from Moscow: 'Send Captain Grigoriy Kagan to the Moscow Air Force headquarters'. I had to obey this order. It turned out the Moscow Air Force headquarters worked on the formation of a hockey team. It was organized by Vsevolod Bobrov, a popular hockey player. I had met him in Tomsk where our Academy relocated from Leningrad. I was fond of playing hockey, when I studied in the Kharkov school. This was Russian hockey with a ball, with 11 team players, a field as big as a football field and a smaller gate. By the way, Russia, Norway, Sweden and Finland play Russian hockey that has been renamed to be called Bandy. The teams of these countries hold championships. I took part in hockey matches in Tomsk. Bobrov was a student of the military logistic school. He attended the games and remembered how I was playing. When Vasiliy, Stalin's son, who was an Air Force pilot and chief, ordered to form an Air Force hockey team, Bobrov remembered me and sent a telegram to invite me. I stayed in Moscow and started training. I wouldn't say I was happy about this turn in my life. My wife Maria lived with her aunt in Leningrad. I wanted to be with my wife and study in the Academy, but I could not reject this offer fearing Vasiliy Stalin. I was considering quitting the team and asked Bobrov to find and replacement for me. I only saw my life, when we toured to Leningrad. On 11th November 1946 our first son Oleg was born. I didn't see my son before early December, when he was almost one month old and I arrived in Leningrad on another tour. Perhaps, Oleg brought me luck. Vsevolod Bobrov had birthday on 1st December and celebrated it on 5th December on the Stalin Constitution Day [on 5th December 1936 the second Constitution of the Soviet Union was adopted and it was commonly called the Stalin's Constitution. It existed till 1977. Until 1991 this day was a Constitution Day, an official holiday in the USSR.] At that time all birthdays were dated for official holidays. Vasiliy Stalin, an Air Force general at the time, decided to arrange Bobrov's birthday party in the hotel where he was staying. Vsevolod invited me to the party. After numerous toasts Vsevolod mentioned to Vasiliy Stalin that I wanted to continue my studies in the academy and that there was already my replacement found. Stalin ordered his adjutant to find General Lieutenant Muraviyov, Communication Forces, Chief of the Academy. It was about 2 o'clock in the morning. The adjutant called him at home and said that Stalin wanted to talk to him. Vasiliy picked the receiver and said that he was sitting in front of a captain who had left for the front line after finishing the first year in the Academy, but wanted to continue his study in the Academy now.

Muraviyov told me to come to his office the following day. When I made my appearance Muraviyov asked me how I was going to study when the classes had begun 3 months before. I replied: 'I'll be an excellent student, don't worry about it'. So I was admitted to the first course of the Communication faculty of the Academy. I kept my word: I had all excellent marks in all subjects in the Academy. I also received a room in the dormitory of the Academy where I could live with my wife and son. I graduated from the Academy with honors on 25th August 1950, and my Jewish surname was written in golden letters on the white marble board in the Academy. There was already strong anti-Semitism in the society. It grew stronger since 1948, the period of struggle against cosmopolitanism [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [25](#). However, I did not face it during my study in the Academy. Upon graduation I was promoted to the rank of major. I was appointed deputy chief of communication forces of the 25th Air Force army deployed in Leningrad. I went to the human resource department of the 25th army. Their HR manager was happy to see me and said I was expected. However, when he read my surname in my diploma, his expression changed and he said that regretfully he had forgotten that this position had already been assigned to someone else. After graduating the Academy with honors and having a job assignment I had no job while I had to provide for my wife and my 4-year old son. I could not find a job. The three of us had to live on 90 rubles per month. I received this allowance for my rank and this was the only income our family had. Of course, I understood this had to do with my Jewish identity: the other graduates of the Academy, who had worse marks than I, were appointed to higher positions and were duly promoted. The military career was closed for me. Some time later I was invited to Moscow where I got an offer to fill the position of a lecturer at a military school. I had a choice to teach electric engineering in Zhytomyr, and this position corresponded to my rank of major, or physical basics of radio equipment and location in anti-aircraft artillery school #3 in Aluksne town in Latvia, and this position corresponded to the rank of lieutenant colonel. I decided for Aluksne, thought Zhytomyr was near Kiev and I could visit my parents if I had decided to go there.

My wife, my son and I moved to Aluksne. The Baltic Republics were annexed to the USSR in 1940 [Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [26](#). The Latvians considered it to be occupation of their country. They treated us as if we were occupants and they were right since we behaved like occupants. When I arrived I was offered to choose some accommodation. I looked around and decided for a small cozy cottage in the center of the town. The owner of the house was ordered to vacate one room for me and he did it obediently. He did not have the right to argue since he might have been arrested for disobedience otherwise. Such requirements were explained as needed by the state. However, the negative attitude of the locals showed itself in many ways. Shop assistants pretended they did not understand Russian, but if they were addressed in Latvian, they smiled in response and sold their goods. I spoke fluent Latvian within half a year and spoke it without an accent, though I did not know the grammar.

I was surprised that there was no anti-Semitism in Latvia. Perhaps, this was another demonstration of the negative attitude of Latvians toward everything that was Soviet. Stalin was an idol for us, but a barbarian and an aggressor for them. If Stalin and his alliances persecuted Jews, it meant that Jews were worth respecting. This was what Latvia thought about the 'Doctors' Plot' [27](#). This persecution started in January 1953 and caused an outburst of anti-Semitism in the USSR. By the way, most lecturers in our school were Jewish. One of them had a rather 'decent' surname of Sorokin, but it didn't do him well: the 5th line item [Item 5] [28](#) was what mattered. This period was very pleasant for me. I was also involved in the sports activities at my school. I was a football



trainer and played hockey for my school. Both students and lecturers had a warm attitude toward me. I liked and enjoyed my job. However, I had to think about my career.

Stalin, the 'father of all people', as he was called, died in March 1953. Many people cried and grieved after him. I also felt the bitterness of this loss. My generation was growing up with the name of Stalin. We sincerely believed Stalin to be the 'best friend of children' and the 'beloved chief of all people' that the official propaganda called him. Even the people who had been affected by Stalin's persecution could not believe that Stalin was connected to this. However, I cannot help mentioning here that when I heard Khrushchev's [29](#) speech on the 20th Congress of the party in 1956 [Twentieth Party Congress] [30](#), I was very happy about it. I thought that if the party was brave and committed to the acknowledgement of mistakes and recognition that the Stalin's regime was a criminal regime. I also believed that our life would improve significantly. I believed everything Khrushchev said at once and unconditionally. Everything Khrushchev said was a revelation for me. How mean Stalin was! He exterminated all those whom he believed to be more intelligent than he was. There were many such people. Nobody could say a word against Stalin. There was a wide network of his volunteer informers. They reported everything to NKVD [31](#). There were decision of 'great' Stalin, the 'best friend of all children' kept in the archives. In those documents he signed his execution verdict for over 40 thousand people, including children under 12. I think Stalin was worse than Hitler, at least with regards to his attitude toward Jews. Hitler did it openly while Stalin exterminated Jews on the quiet, covering himself with crackling phrases about the 'revolutionary need' and falsified trials. Now it's no secret that he had barracks for deported Jews installed in Siberia. There was a mass deportation prepared and this was not his first experience. He had deported the Crimean Tatars, Chechen and Ingushi people [Forced deportation to Siberia] [32](#) before. Jews were to follow into their steps and there were already trains for them prepared. Stalin died on the Jewish holiday of Purim. Could it be that his evil deeds overfilled the God's cup of patience?

One way or another I benefited from Stalin's death. Shortly afterward I was offered the post of communication chief in Moscow. It was a significant promotion for me. I finished the war in the rank of chief of division communication. A corps included 3 divisions. Of course, I gave my consent and did not even ask where this corps was located. Actually, this was the Northern Air Defense in Belomorsk, between Murmansk and Petrozavodsk, 6000 km from Moscow. This town was located on the bank of the last sluice on the Belomor-Baltic Channel. My wife, my son and I moved to where my job was. In 1957 my second son Igor was born in Arkhangelsk.

My predecessor did not work too hard, and I had to work hard to improve the communication system. What made my work much easier was that my former fellow students, who were not as good in his studies as I was, succeeded well having no 5th item. One of my former fellow students even became deputy chief of communication forces of the Ministry of Defense. My friend Mikhail Kapustin, whom I used to help with his studies on various subjects, was communication cable logistic manager in the Ministry. This helped me a lot in the future. I established convenient and extensive communication between the two radio engineering regiments of the corps (in Murmansk and Petrozavodsk) and two RE battalions at the command post. It was based on the cable lines of the Ministry of Communication that we rented. It also covered our neighbors and command posts of the Anti-Aircraft Defense forces of the country and the 22nd Air Force army in Petrozavodsk. Besides, I installed a powerful radio transmitting center in the reinforced concrete shelter that

could not be destroyed even by a direct hit of a radio bomb. Actually, the anti-aircraft defense of the country included just radio engineering forces: two regiments and two battalions. This was another stupidity of the Supreme Commandment: 5 Air Force fighter divisions were not in our subordination. They belonged to the 22nd Air Force army that was under the command of the Air Force rather than the anti-aircraft defense. It was the same with the anti-aircraft artillery units equipped with 100-mm caliber guns and radio engineering facility navigation systems that belonged to the land forces. America proved this inefficiency of the anti-aircraft defense system. One day in summer 1955 a B-47 bomber took off from an US-controlled air field in Norway. It turned around insolently, and this is the only word I can find, over Petrozavodsk, the headquarters of the Northern Military district and the headquarters of the 22nd Air Force army, and flew over the Petrozavodsk-Murmansk railroad. Our anti-aircraft means reproduced this accurately on the command post of the 22nd Air Force army where General Serov was on duty. When our command point requested General Serov why he took no efforts having 5 Air Force fighter divisions available, he declared that we made up the story. So, this B-47 had no obstacles flying over our anti-aircraft means and landed on the Tule air field in Norway. Half hour later another B-47 flew the same route! And again General Serov responded to general Tabunchenko that the anti-aircraft defense was confused about something. The anti-aircraft defense in Moscow asked General Tabunchenko why we hesitated and took no efforts. The general replied that we were aware of what was happening, but we could not hit the plane by our radar set. We should have been grateful to the US commandment for this lesson! Some decisive and serious steps were undertaken. These 5 Air Force fighter regiments were assigned to the anti-aircraft defense agency. Our corps merged with the Arkhangelsk Belomorsk AACD Corps. Then the Severomorsk Corps deployed in Severomorsk north-east of Murmansk was subordinated to us. And finally the Northern and then the 10th separate AACD army covering the territory of the USSR from Vologda [town 350 km north of Moscow] to the Franz-Joseph land [islands in the Arctic Ocean] and from the Finnish border to the Ural were formed. And of course, restaffing took place. General Serov was outranked and resigned. The 22nd army commander was demoted. Commander of the Northern Military district was fired. His replacement was General Tabunchenko, Commander of our corps. His three subordinates, including me, followed him to Arkhangelsk. Despite my Jewish surname I was significantly promoted by being appointed commanding officer of the 34th communication regiment and then chief of the new AACD communication forces. However, before this happened, I had to do a lot of work bringing the communication system to order. The communication system in my 10th separate army spreading to the south, west and east: with the chief AACD command post in Moscow and the neighbors, the Leningrad and Novosibirsk AACD and units of our army in the south, were based on the communication lines that we rented from the Ministry of Communication and the radio communication system. The radio communication was the only way of communication with 'Novaya Zemlia' [New Land]. The main disadvantage of the radio communication in the Far North was the impact of winter ionospheric perturbations on short waves. The radio waves reflected from the ionosphere, and any ionospheric perturbations terminate the radio communication. One can imagine what might happen, when radio communication with the radio location companies on remote northern areas was affected. I requested General Maximenko, chief of the AACD communication forces to provide middle wave transmitters to us, but he refused. I understood that communication failures jeopardized the defense capability of our country, and I addressed this request to comrade Loginov, secretary of the Arkhangelsk regional party committee, who was also a member of the Central Committee of the USSR. Loginov listened to me carefully and understood

me very well, even though he was not a specialist. He told me to write another request to the AACD Headquarters and show it to him before sending it out. As a result, a cipher message was received from the AACD Headquarters. It read: 'Till when this slob, colonel Kagan shall be fooling busy people!' I showed this message to Loginov. He picked the receiver of direct communication with Moscow and loudly explained to the AACD Commander what was going on. The commander ordered to send back the cipher and undertake investigation of this outrageous disgrace. Loginov told me to write a complaint to the Party Central Committee. I described the essence of this cause emphasizing that due to ionospheric perturbations we might fail to provide communication with the units. I also described what was needed to prevent this. A short time later I was invited to the Central Committee in Moscow. General Maximenko was removed from his position and expelled from the party. His replacement general Gavrilenko appointed my friend and former fellow student Vadim Chuyskiy from Kiev chief of the communication forces of the 1st AACD army in Moscow. He was the first of our peer graduates to be promoted to the rank of General for his involvement in the nuclear weapon training that took place near the Ural in 1954. This training covered 4 divisions, 40,000 soldiers and officers. An atomic bomb was dropped and then an order to attack was given. The official report indicated exposure to fireballs and mechanic jolts, but no exposure to radiation. These poor people were exposed to exceeding doses and died a short time later. Well, the first act of General Gavrilenko was provision of R-640 transmitters that are not affected by ionospheric perturbations. I supervised installation of these transmitters on the 'Novaya Zemlia' in many taiga settlements, in the AACD division headquarters and in the headquarters of the 11th regiment in Vorkuta. My commandment developed a very good opinion of me.

On 17 August 1958 I had my last, 163rd, parachute jump in Arkhangelsk. I was chief of the army communication department and a colonel. On the Aviation Day chief of paratroopers of the army suggested that the veterans did a group jump. At landing I hit my leg on the root of a tree, but didn't notice it at once. I only felt pain about two hours later, when we were in the restaurant. I was taken to the hospital in Arkhangelsk where they X-rayed my leg and applied the cast. This happened to be my last jump.

In 1963 I had to resign from the army due to my health condition. I lived a long time in the severe northern climate and it resulted in my foot artery congestion. The doctors said it might mean amputation of my foot. The doctor said that if I wanted to survive, I had to change the climatic conditions and my job. I resigned and decided to move to my parents in Kiev. By that time the relations between my wife and me were misbalanced. Maria took after her father Pyotr Akimov, who was an officer of the czarist army during WWI. She had a strong character and accepted no objections. She even tried to resolve our family disagreements by means of fights and scandals. I wanted to divorce her several times, but divorce was not appreciated in the army. Chief of the political department warned me that if I applied for divorce, I would be expelled from the party and demounted in my position at best. I divorced her immediately after I resigned. I left her everything we had in Arkhangelsk. I wanted to take my books with me, but Maria did not give them to me. My sons studied at school. They stayed with Maria. I left Arkhangelsk having just one small suitcase. I went to my parents in Kiev. I was 43 and had to start life anew. Probably to make my life easier 'Destiny' sent me another wife. My cousin Israel Gershtein, my aunt Olga's son, introduced me to my second wife Asia German. Asia was about to marry Yakov Tsegliar, a composer, but when we met we understood instantly that we were to be together. I remember how Asia and I were preparing to visit my parents. We were both concerned about how they would meet us. My father

had a character and had a negative attitude toward divorce. However, everything went very well. My parents liked Asia. We got married. We had a common wedding. Of course, a traditional Jewish wedding was out of the question: I was a member of the party and we were both atheists. We lived a happy life together. I moved into Asia's one-bedroom apartment. Asia was a dentist. The doctors she knew saved my leg. I didn't even need a surgery. I jogged in the morning until two years before, when I had to stop jogging in the morning. I jogged 7.5 km on weekdays and 10 km at weekends. I was a hockey and a box referee for many years. It was hard. I used to be referee at 3 hockey matches in a row: children at first, 3 15-minute periods, junior teams, 3 20-minute periods, and then adult games. I was on ice all this time. A referee has to be in the center of the field. Besides enjoying the sport, it also paid well and was a good addition to our family budget.

I started experiencing anti-Semitism immediately after I joined the civil life. It was hard for me to ignore it, though it did not refer to me directly. Those were anti-Semitic talks in transport means and in lines. One day something happened that I could never forget. In spring 1964 the Ukrainian Soccer federation authorized me to take command of the parade dedicated to the opening of a season on the Olympic Stadium in Kiev. This was a match between the Kiev and Moscow Dynamo. The teams lined up before the gate of the stadium. I was to lead them onto the field where they were to line up facing the main tribune and then I had to give them this direction: 'Align! Attention! Eyes ...' and then I was to enunciate my words clearly: 'Commander of Parade Colonel Kagan!' When I was already at the head of the column, the master of ceremony approached me and told me to not say my surname! This was unequivocal: my Jewish surname was not to be said at the stadium! This made me angry, of course, but I knew that the parade commander should stay in line whatever the circumstances. I did not object. I don't know whether I was right.

I went to work in the 'Liftmontazh' [elevator assembly] trust in 1964. I was chief mechanic. Shvetsov, chief of the trust, employed Jews willingly, particularly as key personnel. Jews are decent employees and do not drink. Unfortunately, drinking at work was quite common. It was not even persecuted. I didn't like my job due to poor organization and lack of order. It depressed me, particularly considering that I was used to the order in the army. I was lucky again: my former fellow comrade Zakharov, who was a lieutenant in my regiment, became a supervisor in the 'Gosradioprojekt' [state radio project] design institute. We met incidentally and he offered me the position of a design group supervisor. Some time later I was offered the position of chief of department. I could not accept this position for financial restrictions considering that I was receiving a military pension already. I went to work as supervisor of a design group for fire safety automation and communication in another design institute. I wanted to retire in 1975, but my management convinced me to keep working. I finally retired in 1995. They occasionally invite me to work and I never refuse. My institute built a cooperative apartment building and I received a two-bedroom apartment in it. This is where I live now.

My younger sister Yulia finished the College of Economics after the war. She married Iosif Rabin, a Jewish guy. Iosif was born in Kiev and was my peer. When anti-Semitism developed, he changed one letter in his surname to make it sound Russian: Riabin. My sister named her first baby, born in 1947, Boris after mama's brother Boris Braginskiy, executed in 1936. Her second son Mikhail was born in 1950. Our relative working as chief accountant at the factory of artistic glass helped Olga to get employed after finishing the college. Yulia worked as an accountant there till she retired. Yulia died in 1994. She was buried in the Berkovtsy town cemetery. The Lukianovska cemetery [33](#), the

last Jewish cemetery in Kiev, was closed in the 1961. Iosif Riabin died in 2002 and was buried near Yulia's grave. My parents were also buried in this cemetery. My father died in 1965 and my mother died in 1981. The funerals were not Jewish.

I kept in touch with my sons in Arkhangelsk. My older son Oleg wanted to enter the Aviation College in Tomsk, but he failed the exams. Oleg was rather upset. He arrived in Kiev. The situation was critical. If he did not enter a higher educational institution he was to be regimented to the army. I called my friend, the dean of Mechanical Faculty of the Arkhangelsk Forestry College. They admitted Oleg without exams. After finishing the college he worked as chief of the department of urban and rural young people in the regional Komsomol committee in Arkhangelsk. He went on frequent business trips. Oleg was married. His wife did not like it that Oleg was away from home a lot. She left Oleg and remarried. The regional committee declared they could not tolerate that Oleg had divorced. However, they helped him to get a job at the gas department of the town. He was a smart guy and it didn't take long before he was promoted to chief of the department. Before getting married again Oleg asked me whether I agreed if he took his wife's surname of Bykov. I knew he would have a more difficult life with the surname of Kagan. Oleg and his wife Vera have three children: daughters Oksana, born in 1971, Yulia, born in 1975, and son Grigoriy, born in 1977. By the way, I helped my grandson Grigoriy to move to Israel in 2001. He asked my permission to take my surname. There are two Grigoriy Kagans now: my grandson and I. He writes me letters addressing me: 'To Grigoriy Kagan from Grigoriy Kagan'. He works as a driver and prepares to the exams to confirm his qualification.

I helped my younger son Igor to enter the Mechanic and Mathematic Faculty of Leningrad University. He finished his studies with honors and got a job assignment [Mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [34](#) to be a lecturer on mathematic in a college in Arkhangelsk. However, Igor decided for something different. He called me to discuss something. He had a job offer from a militia office and this was a chance for him to stay and work in Leningrad. I wasn't quite happy about it, but this was his life and he was the one to take decisions. He accepted this job offer and became a militiaman. He was promoted soon, got an apartment and remarried. My both sons married non-Jewish women and both changed their surname. Igor adopted his mother's last name. He is Akimov. Igor and Ludmila have three children: daughters Anna, born in 1981, Daria, born in 1988, and my favorite Luka, born in 1994. Igor was promoted to captain. During Perestroika [35](#) he quit the militia and went to work to a realty company. Later he established his own firm. His company is doing well. My sons visit me in Kiev on vacations and I visit them.

I, my friends and my family, besides our professional holiday which was the Air Force Day, celebrated Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November [October Revolution Day] [36](#), Soviet Army Day, Victory Day [37](#). Traditionally on this day officers got together in the division headquarters to go to a restaurant. We celebrated these holidays at work and at home. We also celebrated New Year and family members' birthdays. We had guests and enjoyed the celebrations.

When mass departure of Jews to Israel started in the 1970s, I sympathized and supported them. They wanted a decent life and wanted their children and grandchildren to be decent people and never hear the word 'zhyd' addressed to them. I did not consider departure, but this was my choice. I had a job, my sport and my apartment and I had everything I needed. My sons are here and I want to be with them. However, I believed that everybody had the right to make his own choice and nobody could force them to stay in the USSR, or call them traitors, if they chose to live



in another country. Many of my friends and relatives have moved to Israel. I corresponded with them. We could not even dream that there would be a time, when our people could travel abroad and invite their friends and relatives to visit them. Perestroika brought this time. However, I did not consider Gorbachev [38](#), the leader of the Communist Party, to be a serious politician at first. He gave many promises, but there were few actions, but he managed to accomplish some things. Gorbachev removed the 'Iron Curtain' [39](#), which separated us from the rest of the world for many years. He allowed the freedom of speech and the freedom of press. This is true. But it is also true that the poor and unemployed appeared during his rule. Pensioners could not live on their devaluating pensions. The breakup of the USSR [1991], which crowned the Perestroika, was painful for me. The USSR was a strong and powerful state. What do we have instead? We could save the USSR, had we refused from the leading role of the CPSU and socialist ideas. May capitalism have replaced socialism. May the Baltic Republics have separated: they had been forcefully annexed to the USSR and were occupied and they never accepted this, but all other republics may have stayed with the USSR. We would have been strong together.

In 1989 my dearest wife Asia died. The diagnosis 'cancer' had been given to her shortly before her death. We lived together for over 20 years and I was always grateful to my destiny for having sent Asia to me. Asia's sister Zoya had also lost her husband and we got married, but we lived together less than a year. Zoya obtained permission to move to the USA, but I did not want to go: everything I cherished was here. Zoya left. I suffered from being alone. My sons and grandchildren lived in different towns, and my friends, however numerous, cannot replace my family for me. I met my future wife Ludmila Slovskaya visiting my friends in 1994. Ludmila was born in Kiev in 1930. When we met, she was a widow. Her first husband Konstantin Slovskiy, a Jew, had died few years before we met. He was a wonderful person, and when we got married in 1996, Ludmila kept his surname. I had no objections. We have been together for 8 years. Ludmila worked as chief of the design group in the Institute of Electric Welding. I insisted that she quit her job. We are no longer young and we cannot afford wasting the time that we can spend together. My sons and grandchildren accepted Ludmila. They love her well. She is a wonderful person and one cannot help liking her. We are always together and what is interesting for one is significant and important for another one.

The break up of the USSR terminated my membership in the CPSU. I did not join the Communist Party of Ukraine. I started going to the synagogue. At first I just wanted to recall my childhood, when my father took me to the synagogue with him, but now it has become a necessity for me. I go to the synagogue every Saturday. On my relatives' death anniversaries I recite the Kaddish for them.

A number of Jewish societies were established during the Perestroika. There is also Jewish press. The Jewish life is gradually developing in independent Ukraine. We have gatherings in the association of Jewish veterans twice a month. We know each other well. I also work in the section of Jewish veterans of sports at the Jewish cultural center. I am deputy chairman of this section. Our chairman is a former Olympic champion in fencing. On 24th September 2004 we celebrated the 82nd birthday of Ludmila Yakir-Kogan, the 6-time chess champion and 10-time finalist of Ukraine.

There is another Jewish organization in Ukraine, and that is the Hesed [40](#). I think, it is a very important organization for us. Many Jews would not survive, if it hadn't been for the Hesed's assistance. It's no secret that pensioners are below any poverty lines. Hesed is also involved in another important activity, and that is, attachment of Jews to traditions, to the religion and giving

back our spirituality, lost during the Soviet rule.

## Glossary:

### **1 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

### **2 Lukianovka Jewish cemetery**

It was opened on the outskirts of Kiev in the late 1890s and functioned until 1941. Many monuments and tombs were destroyed during the German occupation of the town in 1941-1943. In 1961 the municipal authorities closed the cemetery and Jewish families had to rebury their relatives in the Jewish sections of a new city cemetery within half a year. A TV Center was built on the site of the former Lukianovka cemetery.

### **3 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.

### **4 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.

### **5 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.

### **6 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.

## **7 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.

## **8 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.

## **9 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.

## **10 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.

## **11 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and

religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

## **12 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.

## **13 Komsomol**

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

## **14 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

## **15 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)**

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

## **16 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In

1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

### **17 German colonists/colony**

Ancestors of German peasants, who were invited by Empress Catherine II in the 18th century to settle in Russia.

### **18 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)**

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

### **19 Blockade of Leningrad**

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

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

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

### **21 Order of the Red Star**

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

### **22 Soviet Army Day**

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

### **23 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in



action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

## **24 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

## **25 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’.

## **26 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.

## **27 Doctors’ Plot**

The Doctors’ Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin’s reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **28 Item 5**

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

## **29 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

## **30 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

## **31 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **32 Forced deportation to Siberia**

Stalin introduced the deportation of Middle Asian people, like the Crimean Tatars and the Chechens, to Siberia. Without warning, people were thrown out of their houses and into vehicles at night. The majority of them died on the way of starvation, cold and illnesses.

## **33 Lukianovka Jewish cemetery**

It was opened on the outskirts of Kiev in the late 1890s and functioned until 1941. Many monuments and tombs were destroyed during the German occupation of the town in 1941-1943. In 1961 the municipal authorities closed the cemetery and Jewish families had to rebury their relatives in the Jewish sections of a new city cemetery within half a year. A TV Center was built on the site of the former Lukianovka cemetery.

## **34 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.

## **35 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.

### **36 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 day 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.

### **37 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.

38 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- ): Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

### **39 Iron Curtain**

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

### **40 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.