

Alexandra (Shifra) Melenevskaya

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St. Petersburg

Russia

Interviewer - Sofia Shifrina

Alexandra Yakovlevna Melenevskaya is a very friendly person, she immediately wins your favour. She is short, has expressive and clever eyes and good sense of humour - she looks like a person who was very practical and energetic in her past, though at present her health status often lets her down. She lives in a two-room apartment with her adult son. It is necessary to nurse him, because he is an invalid (1st group of disability). Their apartment is small, but very cosy, family relations are most friendly, and Alexandra Yakovlevna appeared to be an excellent story-teller. I was surprised at her tenacious memory - how can she remember so long all the dates and details of past events, even if they did not concern her personally? It was very interesting to listen to her, and it seemed to me that she easily recollected hard times and terrible moments of her life. Only the next day she told me that she had not slept all the night after our meeting. This is how strong and enduring she is.

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My family background

My grandmother and grandfather, the parents of my father, lived in Ukraine, in Meleni village - this is where my surname - Melenevskaya - came from. All inhabitants of this village were known under the name of Melenevsky. Irrespective of nationality - Ukrainians or Poles - all of them were Melenevsky. Everyone had such surnames in correspondence with the name of their village.

Samuil Melenevsky, the father of my father was born in 1851 and died in 1937. In our family he was called a Bluebeard - aged 43 (in 1894) he got married to my father's mum when she was 18 years old, besides she was an orphan. Her name was Frida Melenevskaya, I don't know the date of her birth and she died an early death in 1910s, but she had time to give birth to four boys. She lived a difficult life, my father's father was hard to get on with and very self-willed. My father was born in 1895, I know a little about his childhood - all I know is that when they grew up, their father sent his four sons to work as malchiks. According to my father, he was sent to a furniture factory to make Viennese chairs.

My maternal grandmother's (rusme001.jpg) (1870s-1942) and grandfather's (rusme002.jpg) (1870s-1942) surname was Levin. Levins are considered to be people who bring religion to people

(the name originates from the word Levite). They had a house, my grandfather - Yakov Levin - worked in a mill, my grandmother - Mindl Levina - was a housewife, she had 10 children, but only six of them were alive by the beginning of the war. My mum was their first child and she was born in 1895.

Yosif Levin, my uncle and my mother's younger brother (1902-1980s) was born 7 years later my mother's birth. Between him and my mum there were more children, but they died. After his birthday my mum was turned into a nurse, she coddled and babied him. My mum told me, that once she was sitting on the door-step near the door with Yosif in her arms, and my grandfather wanted to get out and pushed her accidentally. And this boy was fussed over very much - first of all because he was a boy, secondly because they went through so many deaths of previous children. So, my mum was carpeted. The memory of it remained with her all her life. Though my grandfather was very kind, I think he gave my mum a swish.

In 1910s my mum Odel Levina (rusme003.jpg) married my father and changed her surname - she became Melenevskaya, and in 1921 my mum gave birth to a son, Ilya Melenevsky, my elder brother (rusme004.jpg). My father (rusme005.jpg) became a member of my mum's family. Mother considered him to be an orphan. All sisters of my mum got to like him, and all his life he helped them as best as he could.

In 1921 when my brother was born, Petliura (1) appeared in the village. My mum and her neighbors secreted themselves in a cellar, because they were afraid to be found. By that time my brother did not reach the age of 1 year yet, he was nothing but a little child and suddenly he started crying. Then people who were sitting in the cellar offered my mum to strangle him (my mum told me), because his cry could announce their presence. But certainly, mum did not do it, thank God, Petliura did not find them and they survived.

I was born in 1926 in Volodarsk Volynsky (a city in Ukraine). In the same year my parents moved to Korysten of Zhitomir oblast (a city in Ukraine). They had a house there and where we lived in. I keep in my memory several episodes. Together with my brother we threw a ball over the roof, though I was a child I remember that he somewhat mocked at me, as a joke certainly. I also remember that my brother was ill with scarlatina and at night he was throwing up - my mum visited him in isolation hospital. And when she came home, she did not permit me to touch her, because it was possible to get the scarlatina infection from a third person - I have a quick remembrance of this episode .

In 1932 when Ukraine suffered from severe starvation, my grandmother and grandfather left for Crimea (Ukainar railway station). They began working at a kolkhoz (a collective farm). Grandfather was already an elderly man and he worked at the water-melon plantation as a watchman, and my grandmother worked at the cheese dairy in this collective farm. It was a very rich Jewish collective farm called Lenindorf - only Jews worked there. So good vineyards they have planted there! The chairman of the collective farm was a very young man - he was very practical and thanks to him this collective farm was flourishing. And you see that they have arrived on an empty place and managed to organize so good collective farm! And for example he organized children for gleaning after harvesting. Children went for gleaning and put ears on special carts. I was a child, I also went there with other children, and after that they gave us melons and water-melons for work.

A German collective farm – Rote Shane – was situated near by. And by the way, these collective farms were good friends. They were so close to each other that there was almost no border between them. At that time there were many Germans in Ukraine, they also moved to Crimea to organize collective farm there, just like my grandmother and grandfather did. They were those Germans who lived in Ukraine and as a matter of fact escaped from starvation. And there they earned money, planted vineyards, water-melons and melons. They had plenty water-melons and melons, besides the collective farm possessed flocks of cows and a cheese dairy.

My grandmother had a cow; this cow was our foster-mother. I remember that our cow got ill – it ate up something wrong. The veterinary told, that the cow should be killed. Grandmother cried so much! It is interesting that the cow also cried. Its tears looked like hailstones. Probably its stomach gave it much pain, probably, it was poisoned by something when grazing.

My grandmother and grandfather made a small house for living of a former cattle-shed; they cut through a pair of windows. The floor was not wooden but made of daubed bricks - and there they lived for seven years, until the time when they left for Leningrad to live with their children. There was no synagogue in this collective farm, but as my grandfather was Levite, he prayed during every Jewish holiday, he put on his special clothes (something white) and a kippah and prayed. Old people came to his place; I remember it and I saw it. They came to him, because all holidays were celebrated at my grandfather's - he was Levite, he belonged to Levites in some degree. I remember my grandfather specially dressed, praying, and everybody repeating after him.

My grandfather and grandmother were remarkably kind. In the beginning of every summer their children came to them for vacation to have a rest and at the same time to help them earning trudodni (8) in the collective farm. I was taken there to spend summer with my grandmother and grandfather, to take fresh country air. Very often I went to my friends to play dolls, and grandfather and grandmother ran round the collective farm searching for me: where am I? After that my grandfather used to appear with a rod and usually said: «Now you will get disciplined with this rod!», and my grandmother covered me with her big body. So I never was disciplined this way.

By that time Ilya, my brother, was already 17 years old, when he came to the collective farm he mounted a horse and did not dismount all summer long. He also worked in the collective farm and liked it very much. He worked there also to help grandmother and grandfather to earn trudodni (8). There was no other way to earn money there.

In 1930 my father's brother (he was a Red Army man of a certain military rank) and his wife moved to Leningrad, later they invited us to Leningrad. When I was about three years old (in 1930) all our family – my mum, daddy, my brother Ilya - moved to Leningrad, and we visited grandmother and grandfather in Crimea only in summer time until 1939, when they also moved to Leningrad.

In 1939 grandmother and grandfather also moved to Leningrad. They lived with the family of their senior son. His apartment was situated next to "Barrikada" movie theatre, at the corner of Nevsky prospect and Herten Street.

At first in Leningrad we lived at my aunt's, until we found a room near the Volkovsky cemetery as I remember, and then we found another room in Tverskaya street. When we lived near the Volkovsky cemetery, I was taken to a kindergarten and I immediately ran to play in a playpit. And

the teacher, who admitted me to the kindergarten said to my daddy: «Well, she is still playing in a playpit!». I remember it. And later we moved to Tverskaya street (between Smolny and Tavrichesky garden) to a room in a six-room communal apartment (22 square meters). At that time my daddy fell ill with contagious tuberculosis. We lived in Tverskaya street for a long time.

Growing up

At the age of 6.5 I was sent to school. I already knew the multiplication table, I could read, but could write only with block-letter. I was admitted to school, it was my brother who brought me there. And at that time my mum took a job. I studied at school no. 12 (Smolninsky district), three pupils were sitting at every desk, because there were not enough schools. Later another school (no. 6) was built (at the corner of Krasnaya Konnitsa and Tverskaya Streets), and we were moved to this school.

In junior school I spent all my spare time at school. I used to come home, quickly made my home task - and went to school again. I was engaged in extracurricular activities. We had a pioneer room, different tasks, competitions. I also studied at art school, which was situated next to our house, and my mum did not know that I studied there. I went there myself, I showed them my drawings and they admitted me. But one day we were modelling something from clay and I cut my hand with a piece of glass, and then I gave up. I also studied to play piano (private tuition). At home we had a piano, but I did not want to play at home too much. Later I went to sing in a chorus in the Palace of Pioneers. In 1936 the Palace of Pioneers was opened and it was very difficult to get there for studying piano, so my mum sent me to the chorus, thinking that I would gradually pass to piano studies. At that time we were just able to make do. If we could have dinner and if we could have a piece of sausage with mashed potatoes or potatoes, the dinner was considered to be very good. We were just able to make do at that time and it was considered to be normal. At that time Torgsins (2) were still functioning. There my mum changed silver wine-glasses and forks from our home for money, to make our life a little bit easier.

In 1936 one floor of our school was occupied by Spanish children, they were brought from Spain. And our teachers taught both us and Spanish children. And near to school there was a two-storied building, where the Spanish children lived. At that time France was at war with Spain. They were wonderful, that Spanish children. Many of them stayed in Leningrad, some of them went back to Spain.

I remember that at school lessons I occupied the second desk. I was fond of mathematics. Leonid Zinovievich was our mathematics teacher, unfortunately I do not remember his surname. He also taught us at the Institute. We adored him. We studied by his tasks more than by textbooks. He liked me very much too, he always told: "When shall I get acquainted with your parents?". He called me "snub-nosed", I am not sure - am I snub-nosed? Anyway, he called me so.

Well, and at school I was a chairman of a pioneer group (rusme007.jpg), I always was a very active girl. I was very good in mathematics, I always prompted everyone, and Leonid Zinovievich shook his ruler at me, forbidding. During the war Leonid Zinovievich got into anti-aircraft troops, he was a higher commander, and later after the war, he lived in Riga and taught mathematics at Nakhimov Naval School. At our school there was one good teacher more - Leonid Samoilovich - he taught us literature. He was a sort of absent-minded man, a Philosophy Doctor; he also gave lectures

somewhere else except our school. He used to come into the classroom without his brief case and asked: "well, have a run around and look, where I left my brief case". It was not easy for me to write compositions at literature lessons, and he helped me, giving additional lessons. Our history teacher was very good too. We studied English language from the fifth form.

In 1930 I saw Sergei Mironovich Kirov (3) first-hand. When they were paving our street with asphalt, I remember, I took off my shoe and put my bare foot on this warm asphalt. Kirov was just passing by, and said: «It's pleasant and warm, isn't it?». I answered: «It is very pleasant». I remember this scene with Kirov in particular. I also saw him during his funeral in 1934, when they transported him from Smolny to Tavrishesky garden, where his coffin was put for farewell ceremony. We did not sleep, everyone was in our court yard, everyone was waiting for him being carried out from Smolny. It was impossible to get there - the same as during Stalin's funeral ceremony: there were a lot of people in the streets. I even remember that at school a meeting was organized devoted to Kirov's murder. In the morning they gathered us for a pioneer line and told us that he had been killed. On December 3 they took him away to Moscow, and at that time my brother (a son of my aunt, my aunt Ida, sister of my mum) was born - we lived with my aunt's family. He was born in 1934 on December 3. And my aunt named him Miron in honour of Kirov, because everyone called Kirov simply "Mironych", and not Sergei.

My mum turned up to work, when my brother had already been called up for military service. It happened when the war with Finland burst out in 1939. At that time he just entered the Institute. So, he left for army. Mother helped him pack his things and a bit later she turned up to work. As for me, in 1939 I was about 13 years old.

In 1940 my mum was arrested and imprisoned. She was called as a witness in the action against a bookkeeper (her collaborator), and she was released already in the war time. She was taken away from Leningrad. When she was released from prison, she got a job of seamstress right there, where she was exiled to (Nevyansk city in the Urals). My mum was a seamstress. She could sew underwear for men and women. My mum died in March 1942 because her health was exhausted. A woman, who lived in the same barrack with her, informed us about her death, she also informed us, that mother was released from prison because they had nothing on her.

Before the war I managed to finish 8 classes. And then the war burst out, almost all time of the siege (4) we lived in Leningrad, and I often watched and extinguished falling fire-bombs, sitting in the garret with children of my age. Later, one day the bomb destroyed the internal wall of a house in my court yard, and everyone who lived on the first floor was killed. People who lived there, did not go to air-raid shelter, because they considered themselves to be protected (they lived under the arch), but the bomb fell down right there - directly downwards from above. All other floors crashed down upon this first floor. That day very many bombs were dropped down, almost each house in Tavrisheskaya Street was destroyed. After that we moved to my aunt. Daddy found plywood somewhere and sealed the window, as after bombardment all houses lost windowpanes.

When the siege began, it was very distressing, I was hungry and stopped going to school. So, in 1942 I did not go to school, though it was open. I was starving and unable to go to school. My father lost 25 kgs. We slept very close to each other, and at night it often seemed that he was already dead. He was not enrolled because of contagious tuberculosis. He worked at the "Krasny Napilnik" factory in Obvodny embankment and left me alone in our municipal apartment, as he did

not leave the factory for weeks. At that time I was 15 years old, and I lived alone in our large municipal apartment, all roomers of our apartment had already died by that time. Only one woman with a little girl (6-7 years old) still lived there. One morning I knocked at their door to take their food cards to help them receive bread. At that time people stood in line from 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning to receive their 125 grammes of bread (I received 125 g and my daddy - 250 g). By that time Bella (this woman's name) did not leave her room any more, she grew weak. I knocked at their door, and nobody answered me. I entered their dark room (there was no electric light, everybody used oil-lamps) and saw Alya, that woman's daughter lying on the bed beside her. Together with Alya we tried to wake her, but we found her dead. I took Alya with me and went to militia to inform them. I hoped to get militia's assistance, but they refused. Then I found Bella's relatives, who buried her. Friends took Alya away to the hospital named after Raukhfuss to treat her, but she died there very soon.

Half of our house was bombed out, and half of our windows were blocked up with plywood, we had toy stoves, and their chimneys were connected directly with fireplaces (our house had stoves-fireplaces - at that time there was no central heating). In the toy stoves we burnt everything we could find - I sawed chairs in pieces and burnt them. There was a small boxroom in the flat, where my neighbour kept boards (he was away for about 4 or 5 months). I took these boards and sawed them in pieces, because I was absolutely frozen. Daddy sewed valenki for me from felt, and I covered my head and hands with a blanket and walked along the streets. I walked this way: «I wish I could reach that drainpipe ...», - I spoke to myself. When I reached it, I stood still for a while. Then - the next drainpipe. When the bomb destroyed our house, I left for my aunt's apartment (Miron's mother), but I regularly visited our apartment. I crossed the Neva river (I went down to Neva near the Military Medical Academy), went up several meters and came to the apartment. We took water from the Neva River, I used sledge.

My cousin Miron (at that time he was 7 years old) and little Ilya (he was three years old) - children of Ida Levina (1908-1962), my aunt -- she also survived that terrible blockade time. My grandmother, Mindl Levina (1880s - 1942), and my grandfather, Yakov Levin (1880s - 1942) also stayed in Leningrad during the siege and died from starvation: grandfather died on March 3, 1942 and grandmother died on April 30 the same year. My aunt, Sofia Levina (1906-1942) died in July 1942. My uncle, Iosif Levin (1902-1980s) had a wife - my aunt Zina - she had a boy born in her first marriage. He died on December 15, he was about 15 years old. We used to be friends. His growing body did not endure the siege. Ella, their younger daughter, survived and together with Ella she was evacuated to Bashkiria, where we (together my daddy) also arrived in November 1942.

My uncle, my mum's brother - Yosif Levin was a chief mechanical engineer at the factory of elastic technical products. In the beginning of March, after the death of my grandfather, Yakov Levin, he was in awful condition, because he could hardly bear starvation. They came to assist him in evacuation and carried him to the train carriage using stretcher. He was taken to Vologda (they were moved in carriages called «calf-sheds», because cattle had been transported in such carriages), and when their train reached Vologda (they were about 40 in it), most of them were taken out already dead. Only several people survived, and all of them were taken to a hospital. So, 2 or 3 months Yosif spent in the hospital of Vologda city. He sent no letters until summer, and we thought he had died on the way.

Ilya Melenevsky, my brother, who was called up in 1939, survived the war and returned home (to Leningrad) only in 1947, because after the end of the war his regiment was sent to Japan, in Manchzhuria. During the war we got no news about Ilya and only in 1945 we received a letter from him with a photo (rusme006.jpg) made in Mongolia, in a photographic studio. In this photo he is sitting at the table with a friend of his. On the back side of the photo he wrote: «There is nothing else to relieve the monotony here - sometimes we have to resort to cognac and champagne, though we dream about something else. Ilya. Moukdek. 1945».

During the war he was at Byelorussian at first, then at the 3rd Ukrainian and at the 4th Ukrainian fronts. Later, when Germans approached Ukraine, they retreated through Kerch, across that very strait, which is now talked over so much. And this is the way they fell back: at first my brother was a tankman, and later he became a driver of a «Willis» car. When retreating, he and his comrade (a guy from Eysk city) were ordered to take out all money from Kerch bank and hide it under water. While they were getting the money, while they were drowning it, our troops had already left Kerch. Then they unearthed two electrical poles, strapped them up and used them to sail across the Kerch strait to come up with their regiment.

On their way across the strait they were caught in a fishing net (the day before it was used by fishermen). Germans nipped at them, and our guys (several boats) got them out to save. And they saved them. But later our troops recaptured Kerch, and my brother found himself in Kerch again, and then they had to fall back from this city for the second time. Later he was at the 4th Ukrainian Front, in Romania and in Czechoslovakia. He finished war in Czechoslovakia. And that guy from Eysk they served together and sailed across that strait, was killed.

During the war

During the war I and my daddy knew nothing about Ilya. Absolutely nothing. Probably because there was no communication with Leningrad. And only after the end of the war when we returned to Leningrad and I entered the Institute, we suddenly received a letter from him from Czechoslovakia. By that time he got to know from our relatives in Kiev (capital of Ukraine) that we had survived and lived in Leningrad. He arrived in Kiev making a military business trip and visited Yosif Kipniss, my mum's uncle at their apartment, where they used to live before the war. He entered their apartment and they rushed towards him, shouted, cried, embraced him – so delighted they were to see him and so glad they were for my and for daddy's sake. You know, we knew nothing about Ilya for many years and wrote about it to my uncle Yosif, so it was he who informed Ilya that we were in Leningrad and that we had already returned from evacuation.

My uncle Yosif Kipniss had a son Grigoriy Kipniss (rusme008.jpg). When the war broke out, Grigoriy was called up to the army and several years my uncle and my aunt knew nothing about him, the same way as we knew nothing about Ilya for a long time. It happened that Grigoriy was taken prisoner, and when Germans drove a column of captives Grigoriy managed to escape. He rolled down into a ditch imperceptibly for guards and waited until the column passed away. So this is the way he escaped. He was picked up by natives – an old man and an old woman, they took him home and cured him. They also advised him to change his Jewish surname Kipnis – so, he became Kipnichenko. These old people kept him at themselves, fed and protected him, probably, they also had a son who was at war somewhere. Grigoriy started working at the railway station as Kipnichenko Grigoriy (he managed to get registered officially somehow, though Germans played

the master everywhere).

Soon partisans got in touch with him. At their request Grigoriy procured some kind of documents while working at this station. These documents were named somehow in German, something like a certificate, used to be given to a person as an evidence of his registration. Thus he saved many people. One day there came some people from partisans and told him, that he had to leave for partisans, because Germans were going to take all people of his age away to Germany. So he was taken away to a partisans group, and after that he went on fighting as a member of the partisan group.

When partisans came close to Kiev, Grigoriy was sent to patrol, because Kiev was occupied by Germans. And there he decided to visit his apartment. He found out that his apartment was occupied by a German henchman, who informed Germans, in Russian this sort of people are called "third ear". Grigoriy had a scrap with him, promised to come back and went to carry out partisans' mission. Grigoriy's former home help, Natasha, saw him visiting his apartment, and later she saw that henchman informing police about Grigoriy's arrival and his promise to return. And as she adored Grigoriy, she hurried to meet him far away from his house to inform about police lying in wait for him. That was the way he was saved once again. Later their partisans' group joined our front-line forces.

For a long time Grigoriy's parents knew nothing about him and wrote letters just in case that somebody could respond or see Grigoriy. And when their partisans' group went through Dnepropetrovsk (a city in Ukraine), Grigoriy visited apartment of his mum's sister, but unknown people already lived there and they knew from letters that Grigoriy had been searched by his relatives. These people were glad to see him, as if he was their relative, and they informed him about the letters and gave him the address of his parents. Grigoriy wrote to his parents, informed that he was at front-line forces alive and in good health.

At that time we were already in Bashkiria, in evacuation, when we received a letter from Yosif Kipniss, my uncle, with joyful news that Grigoriy had been found alive. Later my aunt told, that she received a lot of letters of gratitude from people saved by Grigoriy.

Almost all time of the siege we stayed in Leningrad, but in November 1942 we were evacuated from Leningrad - they took us away across Ladoga Lake. We left for Bashkiria ("White Lake" railway station, Tobynsk village - 6 kms far from the station), which my aunt left for earlier. She had written a letter therefrom and was waiting for us there. So we also left for Bashkiria, where we spent 1.5 years till 1944, though the blockade of Leningrad was raised in the middle of 1943.

There, in Bashkiria, I finished school. When a schoolgirl, I joined Komsomol organization and became a secretary of the school Komsomol group (5). There I got acquainted with Nina, who studied in the same school and became my school-friend. Most of all I liked mathematics, and they did not teach English language at this school, only German. Therefore I studied English by correspondence, I had to go to my teacher in Krasnouralsk, which was situated not far away. I translated topics she gave me and went to see her for reporting. In Krasnousolsk my daddy got a job at glass-works. Some time I also earned additionally by sewing in Tobynsk. Nina Lavrova, my neighbour, mother of my school-friend taught me sewing. She was a dressmaker, and as we spent all our free time at their place, I got learned. When her customers came to try on dresses, she said:

"Shura, go home" - because I said what I saw without fail - I pointed out places where the dress sat awkwardly or badly. But looking at her, I learned to sew and later in Bashkiria I earned money by sewing. I sewed dresses. For example, girls helped to tump potatoes, and I made dresses for them. Even when I studied in the Institute, I earned additionally by sewing - I made blouses. At that time it was difficult to buy this sort of things. But I did not get money, they gave me something else.

The war was not finished yet when we left there - in 1944. Daddy was sent on a business trip to a Leningrad suburb to a glass-works. Being in Leningrad, he visited our apartment and managed to get an invitation for us for return (at that time it was possible to return to Leningrad only on invitation). He came back to Bashkiria to help us moving to Leningrad. He took all of us: me, my aunt, Miron. Later daddy helped Nina to move to Leningrad, and she studied at the same Institute with me, and we were very good friends, and her mum loved me very much.

After the war

I finished school in Bashkiria as an excellent pupil and I got in the First Medical Institute without examinations. To tell the truth, at first I did not know, where to study. I wanted to enter the Shipbuilding Institute. At that time the Shipbuilding Institute was situated near the Admiralty factory. I arrived there, but I lacked some necessary document, and I was told to come again the next day. I also visited the Architectural Institute, they told me to bring my drawings. The next day I went out to hand over documents to an Institute, but which one - I did not know. I was standing at the corner of Sadovaya Street and Nevsky Prospect and waiting for a tram to go to the Admiralty. And the tram was not coming for a long while. I decided to take the first tram I saw. And the first one to come was no. 3 - so I understood that I had to go to Petrogradskaya side where the Medical Institute was situated. My daddy wanted me to become a physician very much. So, I went to Petrogradskaya side and came to the Medical Institute. In 1944 all Institutes suffered from shortage of students, and the Medical Institute had already stopped receiving applications, so they accepted my documents only because I had finished school as an excellent pupil. "Well, if you have only excellent marks, you can pass in your documents" - they told me. So, I did it, came home and started crying: "Daddy, take away my documents, I do not want to study in the Medical Institute!".

But as it couldn't be helped, I went to the Institute. At that time it was difficult to get there: a lot of people everywhere, not enough transport. In order to reach Petrogradskaya side you had to find a place on footboard of a tram. And on my second day I arrived to the Institute having turned my ankle on my way. Again I sent my daddy to take away my documents, but he did not go. I missed a month of studies. And there, in the Institute, they chose me to be a monitor of the group in my absence. So I was a group monitor for five years, the girls were nice to me, so all in all I graduated from the Institute. When I finished the Institute, I had general speciality - at that time there were no particular specialities.

After graduation from the Institute, I got an appointment to Kazakhstan, to Karaganda city. My daddy died, when I was a four-year student. Certainly, if he was alive, they would not send me anywhere, because he was very sick. My daddy, Yakov Melenevsky (1895-1948) died suddenly from a heart attack in 1948.

So we together with Tatyana Tikhomirova, my institute-mate, were sent to Karaganda, in Shakhtinsky district of Karaganda, I worked there 4 years to the day. We lived in a hostel together

with her. We lived in a barrack, but nevertheless we lived in a city, it was possible to go to a theater by car. There, in Karaganda guys from the Moscow Medical Institute worked, and we all got acquainted there. Tanya was sent to work in hospital as a general practitioner, and I was sent to a maternity home. The maternity home was also situated in a barrack. I became a gynaecologist. Near our maternity home the banished Vlasov military (6) were building a new one. In this city there lived people who were banished according to clause 58 (a political clause of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). For example, there was a person, who had invented fuel for space flights. By that time he was already unprisoned and worked as a drugstore director. There were so-called Karlags (Karaganda camps), where a lot of people were kept, and Vlasov military were kept there too. A friend of Chizhevsky worked as a coachman at our maternity home, and Chizhevsky (an inventor of Chizhevsky lamp, which had medical properties) was a stableman. When I worked there in election committee, there worked an English journalist – she was considered to be a spy. Even ministers were kept there.

A barrack is a one-storeyed house, long, with rooms and a corridor - we had our own large room. We cooked in the kitchen, and our cleaner heated the barrack. In our hostel there lived girls who worked at the mine. Toilet was outside the barrack. And across the street there was a Communist Party district committee and we used their toilet – it was a little bit cleaner. In the house there was water supply, but it gave not enough water. All inhabitants were frequently sick with dysentery, including me. When we made biochemical analysis of water, there were found as many microbes as in excrements. And this water fell down from the tap in drops. All night we collected water to use it in the day time.

So I worked in the maternity home 4 years. There were many women going to give birth, so we both assisted in delivery and operated, on the whole we worked normally and were happy – you know, we were young. Sometimes we gathered together, drank wine. Everyone considered us to be very good girls, but when we dragged heavy bags full of bottles empty of wine, people began to doubt, whether we were so good girls. We often invited guests, because we had the largest room, and everyone came to visit us - we lived in the center and really liked to act as hosts. Every holiday - New Year, the 1st of May – we celebrated in our room. In spite of all this, I wished to return home so much – sometimes at night I went to make a telephone call to my aunt Ida, and it kept me awake - I missed home very much, I wanted to get back to Leningrad.

I did not miss the sudden opportunity to return home. Our chief medical officer was going to give birth to her third child, she was going to leave, but it was necessary to repair our maternity home. She told me, that if I managed to arrange repair works in her absence, she would let me go to Leningrad. So, the chief medical officer left, it was necessary to repair the maternity home - but where to assist in delivery in case of repair? We tried to do it at home, but it appeared to be absolutely impossible. Midwives came from home accouchements and complained that houses of Kazakh women were dirty, there was no water and it was absolutely impossible to assist in delivery normally.

And then I started visiting the Communist Party district committee every morning to ask the first secretary about temporary premises for our maternity home. Every morning I came to see him in his study and every day I explained him our problem. I asked him to put at our disposal a house, where we could work temporarily, until our maternity home was under repair. I explained him that

it was impossible to assist in delivery at home. I promised that we would put the house in order by ourselves; we only did not want to assist in delivery at home. At last I managed. They gave us an empty house. A glazier was invited for glass-work. The girls whitewashed everything inside and repaired stoves. And we started working in this house temporarily converted into a maternity home. Everyone was tickled pink.

Among the operating personnel deported from Volga, Crimea, Ukraine there were a lot of Germans. They served at me as interpreters - in case a German woman who was not able to speak Russian came to the maternity home. Or girls, who worked before in the area where Kazakhs lived, and could speak Kazakh language, translated from Kazakh language if there was brought a bleeding woman in childbirth from home delivery. So, I fight against bleeding, the woman stays at my clinic, but she can not understand Russian. And those girls, who worked earlier in Kazakh villages, "worked" for me as interpreters.

This was the way I worked 4 years - from September 1949 till September 1953. However when Stalin died, I still was there, in Kazakhstan. At that time all of us were agitated with the so-called «Doctors' case» (7). I was distressed about it very much, because it was necessary to operate much. Therefore since then, I started fulfilling every prescription myself, involving nobody else. We had perfect midwives; they were German women, deported from Crimea where they had finished a school for midwives. After leaving that school they signed a statement to marry never (it was required) and to devote their life to this noble work. They had neither husbands, nor children, and they were midwives of a high class. At first, when I confronted with difficult cases or pathology, they stood near by and prompted me what was necessary to do. As for me, I was still a girl, there was no specialization in the Institute, and I demonstrated slight knowledge. I remember that the «turn around the leg» they prompted me right during the childbirth - I did not know the way to do it.

At that time my acquaintances from the Communist Party district committee were forcing me to join the Communist Party, but I did not want it very much. It was not because I did not believe in the Party, but because they did not let Party members go home. If you are a Party member - please be sure to give your life as a sacrifice for the Party. And I wanted to be back home to Leningrad again.

So I managed to finish repair of our maternity home, and the chief medical officer, Vera Philimonovna, let me go home. She told nobody about it. I did nothing but left for vacation and never returned. I was very grateful to her for her active help. We have been corresponding for a long time, and one day she came to visit me.

After my arrival to Leningrad, I found my brother Ilya living in the same room, in Tverskaya Street. We shared our room with him equally, put a wood partition, papered it, and I got registered already in my separate room, where I have been living for several years more. By that time my brother got married and Yakov Melenevsky, his son, was born.

Having made a look around, I started searching for a job. Not right away, but I managed to get a job in a maternity home of Zshdanovsky district (Shchorsa Street, 13). I worked there for a short time. Later I was suggested to work in maternity home of Kirovsky district (Oboronnaya Street, 35), where a T.B. prophylactic centre is now situated. Later a maternity home in Marshala Govorova Street was opened, and I worked there for 18 years. I left it only when Mikhail (my son) was already

a school boy.

My future husband was introduced to me by my friends. A son of my mother's friend was his coworker. They did it on purpose, because they were very upset that I was single. My husband, Nickolay Zaichik (1920-1994) studied at Jewish school for 3 years when he lived in Byelorussia (he was born in Ptich settlement, in Byelorussia) - there was no Russian school there. Probably therefore he was respectful to Jewish literature, he subscribed for a "Gimlein" magazine in Jewish language - by the way, he subscribed for it to support this magazine financially - he never read it.

He arrived in Leningrad to enter a technical school. We got acquainted, when he had already graduated from the Institute. I married late, and he married late too. There was a party devoted to November 7; there was a concert in the Cultural Centre for Firemen. We got acquainted with Nikolay, we danced much that evening - he was very good in dancing. It happened on the eve of a holiday, on November 5 or 6. There was a holiday next day, and he told, that he would come to visit me. And he came, really. I got prepared for his visit - I liked him very much. I set a good and sumptuous table. As a matter of fact, I had boyfriends, but I liked Nikolay very much. When he came, we had a lounge for a while, had a talk, and soon Nikolay left, explaining that he had to visit his relative in a hospital. He left and disappeared for two months till the end of December - he gave no telephone call. And only before the New Year day, several days before the holiday, Nikolay suddenly made a telephone call to the maternity home. He said he would like to meet me. I answered that in general I did not object, I was only afraid not to recognize him, because I had not seen him for a long time (that was my way to be sarcastic). Certainly, we met with him, and it turned out that he had been urgently sent away on a business trip to Sakhalin Island for these two months. At that time he worked in Giprorbyflot (the State Research Institute for Fishing Fleet) and they put him out to sea for two months on board a fishing-boat.

We decided to meet at the corner of Nevsky prospect and Sadovaya Street. We had a walk in the center and agreed to celebrate New Year's Eve together in the company of his friend's colleagues. And on December 31 Nikolay came to my place, brought a lot of canned food - at that time it was unknown to us here in Leningrad. For the holiday I baked a pie with lemon and bought some tangerines. We met and went to New Year's Eve party. We did not get a hearty welcome, we were acquainted with nobody, except Ludmila and Egor (Egor was Nikolay's coworker) and we decided to leave. Nikolay arranged a car, Egor told the host that his wife was suddenly seized with headache, and excusing ourselves this way, we left for my place. And all the night long we celebrated New Year's Eve enjoying ourselves. In the morning I had to go for day-and-night duty to the maternity home, and Nikolay escorted me to the door.

Broadly speaking, this meeting was a key one for our acquaintance. We were going about with him for some time, and then we decided to arrange a wedding trip, before registering our marriage. We went to Pena Lake (Kalininsky oblast) - a midwife of our hospital lived there and invited us to visit her to have a rest. Nikolay was a true fisherman, and she told there was a lot of fish and smart mushroom places. And really, we had a very good rest there. And when we came back home, in September, we registered our marriage. That is why our family life started right before our marriage. Our friends were very much pleased with our marriage and on the day of our wedding (they were in the South of the country on the day of our wedding) they sent us a phototelegram with a playful congratulation with a series of unambiguous drawings (rusme009.jpg).

After wedding Nikolay moved to my room in Tverskaya Street, my son, Mikhail Zaichik was born there in 1963. And when Mikhail was 3 years old, Nikolay received an apartment order from Giproybflot – an Institute, where he worked as a deputy chief engineer. At that time this Institute was situated somewhere in Apraksin Dvor and it got money for purchasing a house in Gogolya Street. They moved all tenants of this house to other apartments, and this house in Gogolya Street became a property of Giproybflot. But the administration officers of the Institute still had money in reserve and they bought apartments for those employees who waited for apartments for a long time. This was the way we received our present apartment. At present we still live in this apartment together with my son Mikhail after the death of my husband.

Unfortunately by now I lost many relatives. My brother Ilya died in Israel (he left for Israel in 1991), only my sister-in-law (a wife of my brother) is still alive – she is sick with cancer and undergoes chemotherapy. She lives in Israel.

Glossary:

1. Petliura, Simon (1879-1926): Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.
2. Torgsin stores: Special retail stores, which were established in larger Russian cities in the 1920s with the purpose of selling goods to foreigners. Torgsins sold commodities that were in short supply for hard currency or exchanged them for gold and jewelry, accepting old coins as well. The real aim of this economic experiment that lasted for two years was to swindle out all gold and valuables from the population for the industrial development of the country.
3. Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934): Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.
4. 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.
5. 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.

6. Vlasov military: Members of the voluntary military formations of Russian former prisoners of war that fought on the German side during World War II. They were led by the former Soviet general, A. Vlasov, hence their name.

7. 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.

8. Trudodni - a measure of work used in Soviet collective farms until 1966. A specific economic category caused by specific historical conditions of collective-farm manufacturing. Working one day it was possible to earn from 0.5 up to 4 trudodni. In autumn when the harvest was gathered the collective farm administration calculated the cost of 1 trudoden in money or food equivalent (basing upon the profit). It was used until 1966.