

Ninel Cherevko

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Lvov

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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Ninel Cherevko has lost her son recently - he died in Israel. But she stays reserved and looks younger than her age. She resides in a small 2-room apartment with old furniture that she has had since the first years of her marital life. Ninel speaks very slowly thinking over every phrase she pronounces trying to recall dates and names. One can feel an approach of a teacher and professional lecturer. Ninel often asks for a break, especially when she tells about her father's arrest, occupation and her son's death. She pulls herself together to go on with her story. She enjoys giving an interview as if she is glad to drop her thoughts about her hard life like a heavy load. After the interview Ninel asks me to commemorate her son Alexandr.



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My family background

I often think about the history of my family and I believe it is typical for our country. It shows how Jewish children raised in religious or even moderately religious families observing Jewish traditions dedicated themselves to the revolution and construction of socialism in Russia and became adept to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. They shared the history of their country.

My mother's parents were born in one of the towns in the south of Russia in 1870s. They lived their life in Evpatoria in the east of the Crimea. The population of Evpatoria constituted 30-40 thousand people: Ukrainian, Russian, Crimean tatars, Karaim people and gypsies. There was also Jewish population that wasn't numerous. Here were churches, a synagogue, a Karaim Kinassa and a mosque. The town was at the Black seashore. In summer many holidaymakers came to the town in summer - Evpatoria was a resort at the Black Sea famous for its therapeutic mud.

My grandfather Joseph Doctorovich received traditional Jewish education at cheder. He was a trade agent and representative of few companies. He traveled to smaller villages and towns to make trade deals: he purchased food products: flour, sugar, etc. He had his interest from each deal. My grandmother Irina Doctorovich (in Yiddish she was called Ida). She was a housewife and looked after the children. My grandmother could read and write in Yiddish and Russian. She probably finished a primary school. The Doctorovich family was a bourgeois family: they were educated and intelligent people. They were not poor, but they managed somehow. My grandfather didn't have a permanent income and often there was no money in the family. They lived in a house of 3 rooms and a kitchen in the vicinity of the town.

My mother's parents were moderately religious. My mother told me that they observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated Shabbat. On Friday my grandmother and her daughters cleaned their house and made food for Saturday. They also baked hala bread. There was always Gefilte fish on our Saturday table. Lunch of Saturday was always different than on weekdays. Meat and chicken were a luxury - my grandparents didn't keep any livestock and bought all food products at the market. There was plenty of food sold at the market. My grandfather, when he was at home (when his business required he worked even at Shabbat and ignored religious conventionalities) came home early on Friday and the family changed into clean clothes and sat to a festive table. My grandmother lit candles and the family took to a meal. This is all I know from what my mother told me. My grandmother and grandfather went to synagogue only on big holidays since it was located far from their home - in the center of the town. They celebrated Jewish holidays: Pesach, Yom Kippur and Chanukah. My mother told me little about their celebration: her mother Ida died in 1914 and Jewish traditions left the house along with her. Grandfather Joseph missed her very much. He died in 1917. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Evpatoria. No religious rules were followed at their funeral.

I know two of my mother's sisters. My mother told me that there was also a brother that died in infantry. I don't know his name. The girls studied at a Russian primary school. I don't know whether there was a Jewish school in Evpatoria. Older sister, Sophia, born in 1892, got married in 1920s. She married Sasha Grigorenko a Ukrainian man. They lived nicely together, but they didn't celebrate Jewish or Ukrainian traditions. Sophia had four children: Nikolay, Michael, Valentina and Alexey. Only Nikolay got a higher education. He became a construction engineer. During the Great Patriotic War Sophia and her family were in evacuation and after the war she returned to Evpatoria. She died in the middle of 1980s. After her death we lost track of her children.

My mother's sister Eugenia, born in 1896, became an apprentice in a sewing shop. She began to take part in revolutionary movement in 1910s. She was a member of one of underground Komsomol groups that distributed flyers and propagated communist ideas. Evgenia was one of the first Komsomol [1](#) members in Evpatoria when Komsomol was established in 1918. One of Komsomol members was Liya Shulkina came from a rather wealthy family - her father Moshe owned a mill in Evpatoria. She had a brother. Liya and Misha became Evgenia's friends. Evgenia often came to their house where she met Liya's brother Khaim. She fell in love with him. Khaim stood aside from the Komsomol organizations. During the Civil war of 1914-1918, when the town was occupied by White Guard units [2](#) Komsomol members were shot in the center of the town. Liya Shulkina perished there as well while Misha and Evgenia hid in Misha's house. There is a monument to Komsomol members that perished at that time and the name of Liya Shulkina is engraved on the

marble stone. After the White Guard units left the town Evgenia married Haim Shulkin, a Jewish man. She became a dressmaker and didn't take any part in public activities any longer. Her husband Haim was a trade agent. Misha continued to work at the Komsomol group for some time. When the period of NEP was over [3](#) the father of Haim Moshe was dispossessed [4](#), but since he was too old he wasn't sent in exile to Siberia but stayed at home. In 1929 he died.

In the early 1930s Evgenia and Haim sold their father's house and moved to Simferopol. Haim was a tradesman and Evgenia became a dressmaker. They didn't have any children. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War [5](#) the family of Shulkins - Evgenia, Haim, Haim's brother Misha, his wife Sonia, their son Lyonia and daughter Paulina failed to evacuate and stayed in the occupation. At the beginning of 1942 all Jews were ordered to come to registration. All those that went there perished: Haim, Misha, Sonia and Lyonia. Evgenia didn't go to registration process. She ran away with her niece Paulina. Evgenia and Paulina settled down at the Tatar neighborhood in the vicinity of the town. Tatar houses had no windows and were hid behind high fences. There were narrow streets and Germans were not quite willing to show up there. In that houses Evgenia and Paulina stayed through the whole period of occupation. They only walked in the yard and their Tatar landlady brought them food. After the war Evgenia returned to her apartment. She continued to work as a dressmaker. She died in the middle of 1960s. She had adopted Paulina. Paulina lives with her family in the US.

My mother Clara Doctorovich was born in 1902. After finishing primary school she became an apprentice at the same sewing shop where Evgenia was working. At 14 she became a member of a Marxist organization for young people. At first she assisted her older sister Evgenia, but later she became a propagandist herself. She conducted meetings at industrial enterprises and educational institutions speaking to workers and students about entering the Communist Party to struggle against capitalist suppressors and spread flyers. In this group my mother met my future father Grigory Shwartz.

My grandfather on my father's side Ilia Shwartz was born in Mikhailovskoye town of Melitopol district Tavria province in the south of Russia in 1871. I don't know anything about this town since the family moved to Evpatoria and Mikhailovskoye was just a memory. What I know about it is that it had multinational population like any other town in the south of Russia: there was Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Jewish population and emigrants from the Northern Caucasus. My grandfather received traditional Jewish education - he studied at cheder and then he continued his studies at a primary school after finishing which he finished a Commercial school.

My grandmother Bertha Shwartz, nee Lutrovnik, was also born to the family of a wealthy Jewish merchant Leib Lutrovnik in Mikhailovskoye in 1876. My great grandfather had 4 daughters - he gave all of them good education, so he must have been a wealthy man.

My grandmother Bertha was the oldest daughter. She finished a grammar school and got married. Liya Lutrovnik, the next sister, was born in 1882. Her sister Liya Lutrovnik sent her to continue her education in Paris. She entered medical Faculty in Sorbonne that she graduated successfully in 1912. After she returned from France she worked as a doctor in Evpatoria and became a great specialist in osseous tuberculosis. She worked as Chief Doctor of "Krasnaya Rosa" ['Red Rose'] recreation center for patients with osseous tuberculosis until the beginning of the Great Patriotic

War. During the war Liya was in evacuation and later she became director of a recreation center of the same profile in Balashykha. Liya was an advanced woman of her time. She didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Liya was so busy at work that she didn't have any time left for her personal life. She was single. Liya died in Balashykha in 1965.

My grandmother's sister Sophia Lutrovnik, born in 1885 upon finishing grammar school married Mark Deitorovich, a Jewish man and a popular photographer in Odessa. Their parents insisted on their having a traditional Jewish wedding in Evpatoria with a huppah at the synagogue with a number of guests and a Jewish band. The young couple paid homage to their parents in this way. Further on they didn't observe any Jewish traditions. After the wedding Sophia and her husband moved to Odessa and in 1907 their daughter Irina was born. Sophia and Mark had many hobbies: photographs and theater and cinema that was called "cinematograph" in Odessa.

Later Sophia and Mark moved to Voznesensk of Nikolaev province, in about 150 km from Odessa where they opened a photo shop of their own. Sophia's younger sister Anna Lutrovnik, born in 1889, often visited them in Odessa. After finishing grammar school Anna came to see them before leaving to the University in Sorbonne. In Paris Anna entered the medical faculty of the university in Sorbonne like her sister Liya where she studied several years. At the beginning of WWI Anna returned to Russia. She stayed with her parents in Evpatoria for some time before she moved to her sister in Voznesensk. Anna liked her brother-in-law Mark a lot and never dated with young men of her age. In 1919 Sophia took a lethal dose of some medication and died of poisoning. There were rumors that she had left a letter for Mark where she wrote that she had been in love with another man for several years and poisoned herself seeing no way out of this situation. Anna stayed with her brother-in-law and in a year they registered their marriage at a registry office. Anna didn't change her nee name of Lutrovnik to her husband's. She adopted Sophia's daughter Irina and raised her. They didn't have any more children. Shortly after their wedding Anna, Mark and Irina moved to Moscow - there were too many rumors in Voznesensk about their family. In Moscow Mark got a job at a photo shop and Anna worked as a medical nurse. During the Great Patriotic War Anna and Mark stayed in Moscow, but Irina evacuated. She became a chemical engineer. Mark died in late 1940s. Anna died in 1954. Irina became a scientist and a great specialist in non-organic chemistry. She was single. She died in Moscow in 1994.

My grandmother Bertha married Ilia Shwartz, a Jewish man, in 1893. They had a big traditional Jewish wedding with a huppah, klezmers, a number of guests and lots of presents. The newlyweds lived with my grandmother's parents for some time before they rented an apartment. In 1904 they moved to Evpatoria. My grandfather was a trade agent and my grandmother was a housewife. I would say Bertha and Ilia were moderately religious. They followed the kashrut and celebrated Saturday. However, if my grandfather had something important to do on Saturday or meet with his client he did what he had to do regardless of Saturday. On Saturday Ilia and Bertha went to synagogue. They celebrated Jewish holidays: Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, Purim and Pesach. Their children - my father and his brothers and sisters - didn't observe any Jewish traditions. They were devoted to new communist ideals. Their parents treated them with understanding; they thought their children had to live their own life even if they didn't quite understand the new tendencies in life.

In 1894 my father's sister Revekka was born. She finished grammar school and graduated from the medical faculty of Kharkov University. She became a rontgenologist. Her husband Mark Sokol, a Jew, was also a doctor. They lived in Kharkov. Their only son Alik drowned during military training in Odessa when he was 20. Revekka and Mark were military doctors- they worked in military hospitals through the Great Patriotic War. Revekka died in 1964 and Mark died in the late 1960s.

My father's brother David was born in 1896. He also finished grammar school and got a higher education - I don't know where he studied. He became a chemical engineer. He lived in Moscow, worked in a Military Academy and was a member of the Party. His wife Anna was an English teacher. She was a very nice and educated woman. They had two children. In 1937 [6](#) David was arrested and nobody ever heard about him again. Anna went with her children to her parents in Taganrog. During the war they didn't evacuate and were exterminated along with other Jews of the town.

Isaac, (Izia) was born around 1900. He was a sickly boy that died in infancy in 1915.

My father Grigory Shwartz, the youngest in the family, was born in 1903 and was named Gershl at birth. His schoolmates at grammar school began to call him Gennady and when he was obtaining his passport he changed his first name to Gennady. In 1904 my father's family moved to Evpatoria due to his brother Izia's illness - he had lung problems and doctors advised his parents to move to an area with warm and dry climate. My grandfather bought a one-storied brick house with four big rooms and a kitchen in one of the central streets in Evpatoria where they settled down. They bought new furniture in Simferopol: new wooden beds, wardrobes and chests of drawers. My grandparents' was a wealthy family. My father didn't tell me anything about the Jewish way of life in his family - I think that he was reluctant to recall his Jewish origin when he became a Soviet official. I remember him telling me about Pesach when he asked traditional questions about the history of the holiday and about matsah during Seder and his father answered these questions. I know that my grandmother and grandfather went to the synagogue in one of the central streets on big holidays. They moderately followed the kashrut rules in the house: had individual dishes for meat and dairy food and didn't mix food. My grandparents were raising their children religious. They lit candles on Saturday and celebrated Shabbat. However, when their children grew up they gave up observing Jewish traditions. However, my grandfather also had his part in this - he didn't give his children classical Jewish education. His sons didn't go to cheder or they didn't have Jewish teacher to teach them at home. My father went to a grammar school, but he didn't finish it due to the revolution of 1917. In 1916 he became a member of an underground Marxist group and after the revolution he became head of the Party unit in Evpatoria. When Komsomol was organized in 1918 [7](#) my father became secretary of the party organization of Evpatoria. He made a prompt career being a leader by character. In 1919 my father became a member of the Communist Party. My father met my mother in 1916. They fell in love with one another and got married in 1921 when my father turned 18.

My grandfather and grandmother insisted that my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding, but my parents were against it - they rejected any ancient traditions or rules. They were supported by my father's aunt Liya Lutrovnik - chief doctor of recreation center. She had a big influence on grandmother Bertha and grandfather Iliia and convinced them to let the young people decide for themselves. My father and mother had a civil ceremony at a registry office and a wedding party at

a cultural center of the Komsomol organization. They invited their Komsomol and Party co-members and the only treatment at the wedding was tea with bagels. Guests made passionate speeches about the future of the country: socialism, communism, struggle against enemies of the revolution and victory over them. On the following day relatives of the newly weds got together in the house of my father's parents to greet the young couple. In a month my mother and father left for Moscow to work in the Komsomol central offices.

My father finished a short-term training course and was sent to work at the Central Committee of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]. He became an economist at the department of employment for young people. He studied simultaneously at the evening department of the Institute of public economy named after Plekhanov.

My parents were accommodated in a big apartment building for governmental officials in the very center of Moscow - besides apartments and blocks of a hostel type there were governmental offices of members of Parliament. Say, above a small room where my parents lived there was Michael Kalinin's office [8](#). There was only a bed, a wardrobe and a table and chairs in my parents' room left by former tenants of the room. There was a huge common kitchen on our floor, but my mother often cooked on a kerosene stove in our room.

Growing up

I was born on 11 August 1923. My mother told me there was no space in our room for even a little bed and I slept in a laundry basket until I turned one year old. The first years in Moscow were very difficult. Although my father worked in the Central Committee he received a small salary: at that period the Party 'maximum compensation' principle was effective [Party 'maximum compensation' - maximum salary amount for the Party officials that was quite low to demonstrate their communist modesty and honesty]. Besides, my father didn't hold a high position. My mother didn't go to work for some time after I was born. However, my parents had bright memories about this period of life. It was the time of hope when they were young and full of ideas about construction of a new society expecting only good things in life. Shortly after I was born my mother entered a preparatory course at the institute of Public Economy. After finishing this course she became a student of the Institute. My parents loved each other dearly, but they never demonstrated their feelings - this wasn't decent in their circles. My father traveled a lot and my mother always missed him, but when he returned she just kissed him on his cheek asking him whether he managed to complete his task. My father was a cheerful and hot-tempered man. He grabbed me throwing me high to the ceiling tickling and kissing me.

We spent every summer vacation with my grandparents in Evpatoria. There were no Jewish holidays in summer and we didn't see any religious demonstrations of our grandparents. We liked the food that our grandmother made without giving it a thought whether it was kosher or non-kosher food. Our grandfather prayed in privacy and the children didn't care about what he was doing there. They didn't impose their way of life on us and we enjoyed staying with them. Once my father got a ticket to a recreation center for governmental officials in the Caucasus. There were many young people resting there - revolution was the deed of the young and they held high official posts in the government of the country. In 1927 my father received a cable from Evpatoria that said that my grandfather Ilia died - grandfather was in a recreation center in Kislovodsk and had an infarction. His body was transported to Evpatoria to be buried at the Jewish cemetery in accordance

with the Jewish tradition. My father went to the funeral. My grandmother Bertha lived with her sister Liya after my grandfather died.

In 1926 my mother became a member of the Communist Party, she always wanted to join the Party and be in the first rows of builders of communism. She prepared very thoroughly for an interview in at the district party committee studying works of classics of Marxism-Leninism. To join the Party applicants were to take an exam in front of commission of party officials that asked them questions about the history of the Party, biography of its founders, names of secretaries and other officials, etc. In this same year my father got a promotion - he began to work at the people's Commissariat (Ministry) for Labor. We received two rooms in a communal apartment in Smolenskaya Street, near Arbat in the very center of the city. There were 12 other families residing in this apartment. There was a common kitchen where each family had a table and a kerosene stove, and there was a common sink and a tap with water and a common toilet. Tenants stood in line to get to the toilet in the morning. I remember our neighbor Samuel Rosovski, my father's friend that was head of machine building sector in the state plan organization. Samuel had a wife (Rosa) and a son (Naum). Another neighbor Masunin, also a Jew, was a musician. He was a bachelor and lived with his mother. They had a grand piano in their room and he played it for hours preparing for a concert. There was another neighbor, also a Jew and a teacher of Physics - Romshtein. There was a Russian family with many children and the head of the family was a tram driver. There was an old woman - Ms. Lisa, she came from nobility. We got along very well and I don't remember any arguments about anything that was common for other communal apartments.

Children played together. We played 'hide and seek' running along the corridor and dropping in our neighbors' rooms. Our neighbors offered us tea and sweets. Neighbors often looked after each other's children when their parents had to go out. In 1928 my mother graduated from the Institute of Public Economy named after Plekhanov, and went to work. I went to a kindergarten not far from Arbat. We celebrated Soviet holidays with our neighbors: 1 May, 7 November [9](#) and I remember the New Year of 1928. My father bought a huge Christmas tree it and my parents arranged a celebration for all children of our communal apartment in our room. There were presents under the Tree and treatments on the table: sweets and lemonade. My father disguised as Ded Moroz [Santa Claus], greeted and danced with us. We enjoyed ourselves a lot. This was the first and the last New Year celebration in my prewar childhood - the Soviet authorities cancelled Christmas trees calling them vestige of the past and apart of religious holiday.

My parents had many Jewish friends, - they had Jewish names and appearance - they visited each other, had tea and discussed current subjects. My parents often had gathering at our home. My father had Jewish friends that visited us for the most part: Samuel Rosovski and his wife and others. They were all members of the party and held high official posts. There was no alcohol on the table - they only had a big samovar on the table and had tea talking about the revolution, directions of the Party theory and work. They never mentioned any Jewish traditions or holidays. I guess, they might have been a little ashamed of their origin. At least, my parents and their friends that had excellent conduct of Yiddish never spoke it. They only used some Jewish words when they wanted to emphasize what they were saying or when telling a joke. My parents even demanded that my grandmother Bertha spoke only Russian when we came to see her in Evpatoria.

In 1928 my father joined an opposition of Trotskiy/Zinoviev block [10](#) that had a different idea of further development of revolutionary directions and building of socialism in the country. My father was expelled from the Party and fired from work. My parents had hot discussions at home and sometimes my father's friends came in the evening. In some time my father acknowledged his mistakes in public and was restored at work. In 1929 he was promoted again and appointed as Human resources manager for public economy.

In 1931 my brother was born named Felix after Dzerzhyskiy [11](#). In 1933 the State Plan organization built the first house for their employees where we received a two-room apartment with comforts. The Rozovski family also got an apartment in this house.

In 1931 I went to a Russian secondary school. My mother didn't go to work for some time after Felix was born. When the boy turned two months old my mother hired a nanny, a girl from a Russian village, and went to work. She became a planner at the Cotton agency responsible for manufacture and sales of fabrics from native fibres. After work my mother and I went to walk my brother in the Arbat Street. I liked widow shopping. There was the first Torgsin store opened [12](#) and during our walk in the evening we stared at exotic fruit: bananas and pineapples. We didn't buy anything at this Torgsin store - my mother was strict about the so-called 'luxuries' of life. Sometimes my father walked with us, but he worked a lot, sometimes until late at night. Many higher officials had to work at night since this was the way Stalin worked and he might call anybody he needed at night. Every now and then we dropped by a photo shop in Arbat Street - we had many family photos at that period of time.

Our happy life ended in 1934 when on 1 December Kirov [13](#) was murdered in Leningrad giving a start to the first wave of Stalin's repression. Shortly after the murder the situation in the country got very tense. My parents whispered in the kitchen discussing their issues and their friends often came to talk with them. On 17 December my father didn't come home from work. On the following day NKVD [14](#) officers came to us with a search that lasted several hours. The officers looked closely into every document or photograph they found. They looked at photos where my father was photographed with Kamenev [15](#), Zinoviev [16](#) and other outstanding Party leaders. My father was arrested at the accusation in the coalition of a counterrevolutionary group in Leningrad that was in opposition to the Party. On the next day after the search my mother was expelled from the Party and fired from work declared to be the wife of a traitor supporting her husband in his anti-Soviet activities. NKVD authorities ordered her to leave Moscow within 3 days or else she was subject to administrative deportation. I remember those horrific days when our mother was not like herself from grief preparing to leave. She told me that my father was innocent and that he was a devoted communist and that his arrest was a mistake of the Party. My mother didn't let me go to school to keep me away from abuse. However, my playmates in the yard called me a daughter of an enemy of the people. I burst into tears and my mother told me to stay at home. I need to say here that none of my father's friends came to see us on these days, not even his close friend Rosovski. I don't know whether they were afraid or they believed that my father was an enemy of the people. They also suffered like many other innocent members of the Party in those years. Samuel Rosovski was arrested and executed in 1937 and many of my father's friends and colleagues were arrested and sent in exile.

My father was lucky, so to say. During this initial stage arrested people didn't get executed, as a rule. He was expelled from the Party and sent in administrative exile in Alekminsk of Yakutsk SSR, in 3000 km from Moscow.

My mother and I went to Simferopol to my mother's sister Zhenia and her husband Haim Shulkin. My grandmother Bertha took little Felix to Evpatoria. Shortly afterward my mother was ordered to come to the NKVD office where they told her that she was not allowed to reside in a capital city while Simferopol was the capital of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. So we had to leave for Evpatoria. We moved in with my mother's older sister Sophia Grigorenko. My mother couldn't find a job in Evpatoria - as soon as administration of a company heard that she was the wife of a man that was imprisoned they refused her. I went to school and the attitude towards me was watchful.

We often received letters from my father. He was optimistic and described Alekminsk and his work: he was a planner at the local forestry agency. He rented an apartment there. My father was subject to residential restrictions (he couldn't leave Alekminsk) and had to be registered at the local militia department once a month. We sent him letters and parcels with food and warm clothes. At the beginning of 1936 my mother submitted her request to obtain a permit to visit her husband and in summer this same year after I finished the 5th form my mother, my brother and I left for Alekminsk, located on the bank of the Lena River 600 km from Yakutsk up the river. The trip took us a month. We took a train from Evpatoria to Irkutsk via Moscow, then we went from Irkutsk to Zayarsk [Angarsk at present] by boat, and from Zayarsk to Ust-Koot we hitchhiked. In Ust-Koot we boarded a boat and sailed up the Lena River to Alekminsk in two days. We were struck by the beauty of this area and we enjoyed the landscape in hours and hours.

My father met us on the pier. It's hard to describe the excitement of our seeing each other: there were tears and laughter, questions and stories of our life. My father rented a room where we came, but later his Russian landlady Nastia gave us one more room. She didn't charge us for it. Nastia felt very sorry for my father and took to liking us a lot. I went to school in Alekminsk. There were other children whose fathers were in exile: Sergey Soloviov and Ania Babushkina - their fathers were devoted revolutionaries, and now they were forced to reside in Alekminsk. In 1937 another repression period began. My father lost his sleep and was very nervous - he listened to every sound in the street. In 1938 Soloviov and Babushkin were arrested and executed. Their children and wives vanished from the town. I guess their mothers shared a bitter destiny of wives of 'enemies of the people' and their children were assigned to children's homes. We were happy that our father was left alone. The children whose parents were in exile in Alekminsk were still under some suspicion at school. I became a pioneer in Moscow, but here in Alekminsk I submitted a request to the Komsomol, but I was not admitted. I went to the Komsomol regional committee in Yakutsk, 600 from Alekminsk where I had a discussion with Komsomol authorities. They asked me about my attitude towards the general policy of the Party and Komsomol. I thought that what happened to my father was a misunderstanding and believed sincerely in the communist ideals. I became a Komsomol member right there - at the Komsomol committee and obtained my Komsomol membership card and a badge.

In January 1940 the five-year term of my father's exile was over. He had a permission to leave the town, but his membership in the Party wasn't restored. Besides, he had no right to visit Moscow, Leningrad or other capitals of the Union Republics. We went to Simferopol in the Crimea. My father

had many acquaintances there and got a job at the fuel department of the Council of Ministers of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. We rented a small room at the gypsy neighborhood of the town. We didn't have any belongings and had to begin from the start. I went to the 10th form and finished school in 1941. We had a prom on 21 June 1941. I finished school with honors. In the morning of 22 June 1941 [16](#) we heard on the radio about the beginning of the Great patriotic war.

During the War

On the first days of the war my father volunteered to the front. He was 38 and was not subject to immediate recruitment at the very beginning of the war, but my father couldn't stay home. He wished to redeem his fault and join the first rows of those that defended our Motherland. Even that my mother was pregnant didn't stop him.

At the beginning of July 1941 my father went to the front as a private. My mother, Felix and I got an opportunity to evacuate since my father was a military. We went in a sleeping compartment of a passenger train with other members of the families of Soviet officials. We got food packages and were well provided during our trip. The trip lasted for about a month until we reached the farm village of Grushki in Udobnaya village at the border of Krasnodar and Stavropol regions in 1500 km to the East from the Crimea. There were 60 houses in this farm village. We were accommodated in one of them. The collective farm was responsible for supporting us. We received food from their storages that was quite sufficient for us. Chairman of the collective farm took my mother to the maternity home in a district center in his own car and came to pick her up when she gave birth to a boy, Alyosha. We didn't stay long in that village - there was less and less food provided to us and there was no place to work. There was no doctor or nurse. Since my mother had a baby she obtained permission to move to Sovietskaya village in 40 km from Grushki and 25 km from Armavir. The population of the village was 20-25 thousand people. There were few wealthy collective farms in the village. We were taken to the collective farm named after Steingart [18](#).

My mother, Felix and Alyosha settled down at the milk farm. Alyosha was a weak boy. He couldn't even sit when he was one year old. Winters were cold and there was no wood to heat our room. Alyosha often caught cold and died at one year and two months. My mother couldn't write my father about his death until he guessed from her silence. After the baby died my mother went to work at the farm as a milkmaid and Felix and she had enough dairy products.

I attended a course of tractor operators at the collective farm equipment yard. After finishing it I began to work at a tractor crew. We didn't get money for our work, but food products for each work day. Actually the collective farm provided all necessary food products to us. We didn't have any lack of food, but we had no money provisions. Since we didn't have any warm clothes with us (when we were leaving home we didn't think it was for long) and didn't have any opportunity to buy clothes. We lived in barracks in the field and lived in crews. Our crew worked in 12 km from the village and my mother's crew worked in 18 km from the village. We were almost the only Jewish family in this collective farm, but there was no anti-Semitism whatsoever. People treated us nicely and we got along well with them.

In August 1942 Germans came close to the Krasnodar region. We had to go further to the East. We walked across a canyon in the mountains moving cattle of the collective farm to a new location. We walked for about a month until we came to a crossing through the Kuban River. It was already

bombed by Germans. They were on the opposite side of the river and we were cut off from escape to the East. Our caravan turned back to walk to the village. We were overwhelmed with fear - we had heard rumors about the attitude of Germans towards Jews: ghettos, concentration camps and mass shootings. We were trying to hide in bushes and between trees.

When we returned there were fascists in the Sovietskaya village. My mother and I went to the location where our crews had worked. The collective farm went on with its work. It was August - the harvesting time and all grain was shipped to Germany. Germans stayed at the gendarmerie in the village - they were afraid to go to the outskirts of the area fearing partisans. The headman of the area Butz, a former accountant of the collective farm, (he came from a family of Kuban kazaks) did a lot for us. He came to the crew where my mother and I were working and told my mother to destroy all documents that witnessed about our Jewish origin and calmed us down saying that we didn't quite look like Jews - we were fair-haired and had fair eyes - and had nothing to fear about. He also assured us that other farmers wouldn't report on us to fascists since they respected us much. He promised to notify us on German plans if they decided to visit the crews.

Fortunately, occupation lasted only 6 months. They were the most horrific months in our life. Within 6 months Germans shot 7 thousand Jews and Party activists in the outskirts of Armavir. Varvara Burdova, a young woman, a former chairman of the collective farm, was also shot at that time. Once somebody told my mother that a number of Jewish people moved across our village to be shot and that I was among them. My mother ran all the way to my crew and when she saw that I was there she fell on the ground exhausted. Few times in those 6 months Butz sent a messenger - usually a boy riding a horse to notify me that Germans were coming and I escaped to the steppe. He was a very wise man trying to save people's lives by all means. He followed all instructions or directions he got from Germans: he gave them food products and everything they demanded to pay off for their loyalty to the people. On 23 February 1943 Red Army units liberated the village. People were very happy - they greeted, hugged and kissed one another. It's hard to tell what it is like to feel free after a nightmare of the war. The headman was arrested for supporting Germans. My mother and I wrote a letter to NKVD office telling them that Butz actually saved our family and many other people who he helped also wrote such letters. Butz was released though it happened after we left the village.

In summer 1943 institutes were opened in Krasnoyarsk. I saw in a newspaper that the Krasnodar Institute of food industry published an announcement about admission to the institute. My fellow tractor operators told me to go there. They said I had to study rather than drive a tractor. The collective farm gave me some grain that my mother and I sold to buy tickets and I left for Krasnodar. I had to have the documents that were destroyed during occupation reissued. I obtained a certificate from the collective farm to get a passport, but there was no way to get back my school certificate. Nevertheless, I passed exams for the school program with the highest grades and was admitted to the Institute.

My mother and Felix stayed in the village. My mother became a planner at the village office. I rented a dwelling in a private house - there was no hostel at the Institute. What a surprise was my father's arrival in spring 1944. Once a 10-year-old girl came to my classroom at the institute and shouted 'Nelia, you father is here!' and my father came in wearing a uniform with lieutenant' straps. My lecturer let me go home and my father and I left the room. It turned out that my

father's military unit was deployed in 80 km from Krasnodar. My father got a leave and found me. All women came to the yard oh the house where I lived. My father was standing in the middle of the yard bent over a bowl and my landlady was pouring water for him to wash and the women standing around were crying. Each one had a son or husband at the front and many of them were notified that their dear ones had perished.

In summer 1944 my father's military unit was in Nezhyn near Kiev and there my father demobilized from the army. My mother and Felix joined him in Nezhyn and I came there shortly afterward - in August 1944. I decided to continue education at the Institute of food industry in Kiev, but it was still closed. I came to Kiev Polytechnic Institute where I met a man that began to convince me to come to study at the Polytechnic Institute in Lvov. He promised that I would get accommodation and I agreed standing in a half-ruined building of the Institute. I came to Lvov in October 1944 and have lived my life here ever since. My family was in Kiev: my father worked at the military headquarters and Felix went to school.

I've had a good life. I was admitted to chemical technological faculty of the Lvov Polytechnic institute. Why that man was trying to convince me - it was a general policy of the country to have more people from eastern areas of the country to come to these regions that had joined the USSR recently [Lvov was one of such towns]. There were Russian, Polish and Jewish students at the Institute. There were few local Ukrainians, though. It was difficult for them to enter an Institute - they didn't study in Soviet schools or they didn't have any privileges of veterans of the war since they didn't quite struggle against Germans. There were 3 young men from Lvov among my fellow students. Therefore, at the Institute we didn't feel that 'hostile' environment existing in Western parts of Ukraine after the war. We lived in a hostel: 10 tenants in a room, but we enjoyed ourselves a lot. Besides, we were very happy that the war was over in the territory of our country. There was no national segregation. Lecturers at the Institute lectured in 3 languages: Ukrainian, Russian and Polish based on what their mother tongue was. Students understood and communicated in these 3 languages. We were all looking forward to the end of the war. I remember Victory Day of 9 May 1945 - we had a celebration at the institute and how happy we were!

After the War

There was a number of students at the Institute that were veterans of the war. One of them - Ivan Cherevko - was especially courteous: he brought me books and flowers. He told me of his love and I realized that I loved him, too. At the end of 1945 we got married. We had a small party at the hostel of the institute. My parents were not able to come to our wedding - my father had to work, and, besides, it was hard to get on a train. They greeted us with a letter and wished us happiness.

My husband was born to a Ukrainian working family in a village in Vinnitsa region in 1916. After finishing school he worked at a plant. Ivan was recruited to the army in 1943. He was severely wounded at the front and stayed in hospital for a long time. He lost his leg and became an invalid. After we got married Ivan got a small room at a communal apartment in a communal apartment - the previous tenant of this room that was Polish had moved to Warsaw. We bought our first furniture from her: a beautiful ancient wardrobe, escritoire, beds and sideboards of mahogany tree that I still have.

In 1946 after my father demobilized from the army my father, mother and grandmother Bertha, Felix and my younger sister Tania, she was born in 1945, came to live with us. All 7 of us lived in a small room during the first year until my father received a two-room apartment. My family accepted my husband cordially. My grandmother Bertha didn't live long with my parents. She was used to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate holidays and follow the kashrut. My father didn't show his disapproval, but she may have seen that he wasn't quite happy about it. She went to visit her older daughter Revekka in Kharkov and stayed there. She died in the early 1950s.

My father got a job at the fuel agency and later became a deputy manager of Lvov coal agency. Shortly after the war he submitted a request and his membership in the Party was restored. My mother never tried to restore her membership in the Party - she couldn't care less about it. Her family filled her life.

In 1951 when Jews were persecuted all over the country [19](#), and anti-Semitism on the state level was very strong my father was removed to a lower position of engineer at Construction department. My father didn't give up. He wrote letters to the town and regional Party Committees and went to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Kiev. He wrote in his letters that the only reason for his persecutions at work was his national origin. I don't know whether my father's letters or Stalin's death helped my father to hold back his position in May 1953. My father was a devoted communist until the end of his life; he was sure that what happened to him and to us was just a misunderstanding and that mistakes were inevitable in the process of building a new society. He was grieving after Stalin and took denunciation of the cult of Stalin at 20 Congress of the CPSU [20](#) as a personal blow - he was sure that Stalin was innocent. My mother, however, was rather skeptical about the ideas she was fond of when she was young at the end of her life. Tania died of diphtheria in 1949 and my mother developed severe depression after the loss of her daughter. She died in 1965. My father worked until the last day of his life. He died of infarction in 1969. They were buried at the town cemetery in Lvov.

My brother Felix graduated from the faculty of geophysics of Lvov Polytechnic Institute and went on job assignment to the town of Perm in 1200 km from Lvov. He married a Russian girl - Aida and lives there. They have two sons: Pavel and Grigory that live there, too. We correspond and call each other on birthdays and at New Year.

My husband and I graduated the Institute in and stayed to work there. My husband got a profession of economist. He entered a post-graduate course in Leningrad and defended his thesis of Candidate of Sciences in 1951 and thesis of Doctor of Sciences - in 1969. Then he worked at the Department of the Institute of Economy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Lvov. He never cared about politics - all he cared about was science, but he had to join the Party to make a career.

I became involved in a new science - technical microbiology. In 1968 I defended my thesis of Candidate of Sciences. That same year I became a member of the Communist Party. I had to join the Party since I was lecturer at the Institute and also taught at the Higher School of the Party. Besides, I was a convinced supporter of the communist ideas. I believed that the Communist party would build a fair, just and prosperous society in the USSR. I worked at the Institute 50 years (1948 - 1998) and there were many scientists, candidates of sciences, doctors of sciences and professors among that chose the subject I taught to be their speciality. Every year we traditionally meet at the

Institute.

My husband and I had three sons: Alexandr, born in 1946, Sergey, born in 1951 and Victor, born in 1954. My sons took my husband's nationality to avoid any national problems. They've always known that their mother is a Jew, but they didn't give it much thought. Alexandr and Sergey graduated from the Lvov Polytechnic institute. Alexandr became an automation engineer and Sergey became a production engineer. Victor graduated from the Institute of Public economy in Lvov.

We had a nice family: our sons' friends, our colleagues and pupils: Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian and Polish, we enjoyed spending time together, getting together for a cup of tea and for a chat. On birthdays and on holidays we used to have over 20 friends at home. We read a lot of Russian and foreign classic and fiction books. My husband and I often went to the Opera and Drama theaters. Children spent their summer vacations in pioneer camps. We always spent one summer month at the seashore in Crimea or Caucasus.

We are atheists. I never faced any anti-Semitism. We've never celebrated any Jewish or Christian holidays and never discussed national issues. My husband and I were glad that Israel became a separate state, but we've never considered emigration. We were surprised when Alexandr became fond of Judaism and changed his nationality to Jewish in 1996. He went to registry office with my birth certificate. He explained what he wanted and obtained permission to change his nationality.

In 1999 after my husband died Alexandr and his family moved to Israel. He married a Jewish girl, his co-student. He's got a job there. In summer 2002 Alexandr fell ill with blood cancer. Victor, his younger brother, flew to Israel, to give his marrow for transplantation for his brother, but it didn't help. At the beginning of November 2002 Alexandr passed away. It's hard to believe that Alexandr is gone. I didn't see him dying and he lives in my heart.

Sergey lives in Lvov. He often comes to see me. His wife is Ukrainian and they have a very nice family. His daughter Ninel, named after me, finished a choreographic school. She went to the US on tour and stayed there. She is a dancer in Los Angeles. My granddaughter Lena, Victor's daughter, lives in Lvov. She is 19. Lena is a student of Lvov University.

As of late I feel interested in my roots and the history of my people. I often look at photographs of the ones I love. I am interested in the history and culture of the Jewish people. I attend Hesed in Lvov, read Jewish newspapers and celebrate Pesach. I am interested in Jewish traditions and including Jewish traditional food. Sometimes I feel sorry for staying away from the traditions of my people in the course of life. I wish I knew Yiddish and Hebrew. But anyway, I can say that I've lived a happy life.

Glossary

1. Komsomol -Communist youth organization created by the Communist Party to make sure that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.
2. White - military units fighting for monarchic regime in Russia and for the Tsar.

3. NEP - The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by wars and revolution. After the October Revolution and the Civil War, the economy of the USSR was destroyed, so the government decided to launch a New Economic Policy (NEP). They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. But at the end of the 1920s, after a certain stabilization of these entrepreneurs, they died out due to heavy taxes.
4. The majority of wealthy farmers that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to the Soviet power were declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.
5. 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 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet Union and then Russia have called that phase of World War II, thus began inauspiciously for the Soviet Union.
6. In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the 'Great Terror'. Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.
7. Komsomol - Communist youth organization created by the Communist Party to make sure that the state would be in control of the ideological upbringing and spiritual development of the youth almost until the age of 30.
8. Mikhail Kalinin (1875-1946), political activist, in 1919 Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of the RSFSR, in 1922 Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, in 1938 Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Was among the closest political surrounding of J. Stalin; sanctioned mass repressions of 1930-40s.
9. 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.
10. On Lenin's death (1924), Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Joseph Stalin formed a ruling triumvirate. Zinoviev led the triumvirate's attack on Leon Trotsky, calling for his expulsion from the party. After an initial victory over Trotsky (1924), Stalin, in an effort to consolidate his own power, turned against Zinoviev and Kamenev, defeating them and their so-called left opposition in 1925. Zinoviev and Kamenev then allied themselves with Trotsky (1926), but to no avail. Zinoviev was removed from his party posts in 1926 and expelled from the party in 1927. He recanted and was readmitted in 1928 but wielded little influence. Many features of the Zinoviev-Kamenev program, emphasizing rapid industrialization and collectivization, were incorporated (1928) in Stalin's first Five-Year Plan. In 1935, Zinoviev was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment purportedly for giving his encouragement to the assassins of Sergei Kirov. Accused (1936) of conspiring to overthrow the government, he was the chief defendant in the first of the trials held by Stalin, which resulted in Zinoviev's execution along with Kamenev and 13 other old Bolsheviks.

11. Felix Dzerzhinskiy (1876 - 1926) was a Polish Communist and head of the Bolshevik secret police the Cheka, later the KGB. He was appointed by Lenin to organize a force to combat internal political threats and on December 20 the establishment of the Vecheka (All Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage) was passed by the Council of Peoples Commissars. Dzerzhinsky also began organizing the internal security troops to enforce the Cheka's authority. Lenin gave the organization huge powers to combat the opposition during the Civil War. At the end of the Civil War in 1922, the Cheka was changed into the GPU (State Political Directorate) a section of the NKVD, but this did not diminish Dzerzhinskiy's power: from 1921-24 he was Minister of Interior, head of the Cheka/GPU/OGPU, Minister for Communications and head of the Russian Council of National Economy. Dzerzhinskiy died a natural death in July 1926.

12. Such shops were created in the 1920s to support commerce with foreigners. One could buy good quality food products and clothing in exchange for gold and antiquities in such shops.

13. Sergey Kirov (real name Kostrikov) (1886-1934), A Soviet political and party leader, dedicated to the idea of communism, gained popularity with Soviet people. In 1921 he became 1st secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party. In 1926 became 1st secretary of the Party town and regional part committee, Northwestern bureau of central Committee of All-Union Party of Bolsheviks; 1934 - secretary of All-Union Party of Bolsheviks. Member of central Committee of the Party since 1923. Member of Political Bureau of the Central Committee. Assassinated in 1930 at Stalin's direction.

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

15. Lev KAMENEV (real name Rozenfeld), Jew, (1883-1936), political activist, revolutionary and devoted fighter for communism, state leader. In 1935 imprisoned for espionage, executed in 1936; rehabilitated posthumously.

16. Grigoriy ZINOVIEV (real name Radomyslskiy) (1883-1936), political leader, activist, Member of the Central Committee of the Party in 1907-27; member of the Political Bureau of the Communist party of the USSR. In 1934 sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for anti-Soviet activities and propaganda; in 1936 sentenced to death and executed, rehabilitated posthumously.

17. On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.

18. Alexandr Steingart (1887, Odessa - 1934, Moscow), party activist, Bolshevik. 1921-25 Head of organization department of Political Headquarters, Revolutionary Committee of the Red Army. 1933 deputy chief of Political Department of People's Committee for Agriculture, USSR. One of the leading conductors of Stalin's policy in villages. Involved in mass repression of peasants during collectivization. Buried by the Kremlin wall.

19. Anti-Semitic campaign initiated by J. Stalin against intellectuals: teachers, doctors and scientists.

20. 20th 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 was happening in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.