

# Rachel Persitz

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Kiev

Ukraine

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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My grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side, Haim Lagotskiy and Riva Lagotskaya, lived in the small town of Chernobyl, Kiev province, in the 1860s. The town had Ukrainian and Jewish inhabitants. There were 30 or 40 Jewish families. They were craftsmen and tradesmen: shoemakers, tinsmiths, carpenters, and so on. There was a synagogue and a cheder in town. My grandmother got married at 16. Their older daughter, Rohl, was born around 1884 when my grandmother was 18 years old. Then there came the sons Meyr, Zisl and Gersh and the daughters Bella, my mother, and Zlata.

My grandfather's family was very poor. My grandfather was a worker. He could build a brick house, construct a stove; and he was a good joiner and carpenter. He worked for richer people: merchants, the bourgeois and landlords. He was extremely honest and decent. Once he was replacing floors and discovered a treasure of jewelry and ancient golden coins. He immediately called the master showing him what he had found. The master thanked my grandfather and generously gave him one golden coin. He was very happy about the treasure and about my grandfather's honesty. My grandmother couldn't forget this incident for a few years and said, 'You should have taken a few coins, look how poor we are!' My grandfather replied, 'How could I lie to my poretz [lord in Yiddish]?'

My grandmother Riva was a housewife. Her children worked from their early childhood. The boys were helping their father and later studied to be shoemakers. The girls helped Riva about the house. They had a garden and a kitchen garden and kept livestock. They lived in a small house with a thatched roof. I remember this house well. There was a stove in the center of it. There were two rooms and a small kitchen. There were dried herbs and bunches of onions on the walls. There was a cellar to store potatoes and other food for winter. The furniture in the house was plain: tables, chairs, beds and a big wooden wardrobe. There were a few religious books in the house. The boys received elementary religious education. They went to cheder. Later they all became shoemakers.

My grandparents were very religious. Every morning my grandfather put on his tallit and tefillin and prayed, pronouncing strange words, as I recall. [The interviewee is talking about prayers in Hebrew.] He never worked on Saturdays, even if his employer wasn't very happy about it. They observed the Sabbath. My grandmother always tried to cook something delicious, even during the hard years of the Civil War [1918-1921]. Sometimes we just had plain potato pancakes, but they were so good. They celebrated all religious holidays: Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Chanukkah.

My mother's older brother, Meyr, born in 1885, and his wife, Haya, lived in Chernobyl. His older son, Shaya, perished at the front during World War II. His second son, Zyunia, returned from the

war as an invalid and died in 1954. Meyr, his wife and their two daughters were in Kustanai in evacuation. Meyr and Haya died in the middle of the 1960s. Their daughters, Sonia and Zhenia, live in Israel.

My mother's brother Zisl was born in 1887. During the war Zisl, his wife Rosa and their two daughters, Lisa and Sarah, evacuated to the Northern Caucasus. I don't know exactly what happened to them there - whether they perished in occupation or starved to death. They never returned from evacuation. Zisl's older son Zyunia was at the front and was awarded the 'Order of the Red Star'. He died in Israel in 1996.

My mother's younger brother Gershl was born in 1889. Before the beginning of the Great Patriotic War [1](#) he lived in Kiev with his wife Sorl, their daughters, Rosa and Eva, and their son Zyunia. Gershl was a shoemaker in Podol [2](#). When the war began only Eva and her two sons managed to go into evacuation. Gershl, his wife Sorl and Zyunia stayed in Kiev. Zyunia had tuberculosis and Gershl was afraid to move him. Rosa and her two children also stayed. They were all killed in Babi Yar [3](#). Eva and her sons returned to Kiev from evacuation. She worked in a bakery before the 1970s. She died in the middle of the 1990s. Her son Mark lives in Israel.

My mother's older sister Rohl died in an unknown epidemic before the Great Patriotic War. Her daughters Sonia, Zina and Basia live in Israel. We didn't keep in touch with them, so I don't have any information about them.

My mother's sister Zlata became a widow during World War II. Her husband perished at the front. He was a tailor before the war. They lived in Chernobyl. During the war Zlata and her son Zyunia were in evacuation. In the early 1970s Zlata, her son and his family moved to America. She died there shortly afterwards. Zyunia lives in Philadelphia now.

My mother, Bella Lagotskaya was born in 1892. She didn't get any education. She lived in Chernobyl with her parents and helped her mother with the housekeeping and gardening. When my mother turned 18 she left her parents' house. My grandfather Haim was very ill and couldn't provide for his big family any longer. His sons and his older daughter Rohl were living separately already, and my mother decided to go to Kiev. She became a seamstress in a tailor's shop, owned by Abram Persitz, the older brother of my father, Moshe Persitz.

I know hardly anything about my grandfather on my father's side, Samuel Persitz. I only know that he and my grandmother Riva lived in Simferopol, Crimea. My grandfather died before the revolution of 1917. My grandmother came to Kiev once, but I don't remember her.

I knew my father's brothers very well though. They all received religious education, finished cheder and were religious people. They didn't serve in the tsarist army. The service term was 25 years. Perhaps, they didn't go to the army because of their religious beliefs, or because they just didn't want to go. They bribed the authorities and were relieved from service.

My father's older brother Abram was born around 1880. Abram was married to a Jewish woman called Riva. He was a wealthy man before the revolution. He lived in a beautiful big apartment. His tailor's shop was still open during the NEP [4](#), but was expropriated later. Also, two other families got accommodation in Abram's apartment. This all had a dramatic impact on my uncle. He fell ill and died from a heart attack sometime in 1925. Abram had three sons: Mikhail, Boris and Shlema.

His older sons graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic Institute and became engineers. His younger son, Shlema, studied at a technical college. During the war they were all in evacuation and returned to Kiev afterwards. Shlema died shortly after the war, and Mikhail and Boris died in the middle of the 1980s.

My father's other brother, Lazar, was born in 1885. Before the revolution of 1917 he lived with his family in a Siberian town, where he married a Jewish woman. He moved to Kiev in the early 1920s and lived with his brother Abram. Lazar was a tailor and made women's clothes. Lazar was in evacuation during the war, and then he returned to Kiev. He died in the early 1960s. Lazar's older daughter Lisa lives in Germany. His younger daughter Sonia died. Lazar's son Iosif was an engineer. In the late 1920s Iosif was sent to England by train, and he lived there several years. Later he lived and worked in Moscow, and now he lives in America.

My father was the same age as my mother. He was born in 1892. He lived with his older brother Abram and worked in his shop. He met my mother in this shop in 1910. My mother worked in the same shop and rented a room in Abram's house. They fell in love with each other.

My parents got married in 1911. They had a traditional Jewish wedding, although it was only a small one. The bride and bridegroom stood under the chuppah at the synagogue in Schekavitskaya street [this synagogue is still there]. There was a rabbi, and the closest relatives and friends were there. Abram paid for my mother's wedding gown and the rings. He covered all the other expenses for the wedding, too. This was all his support for the young couple. He probably wasn't very happy about Moshe marrying a poor girl whose parents didn't give her any dowry.

In the beginning my parents rented a small room in Podol [3](#). In 1912, after my older sister Genia was born, they moved to a small apartment. I was born there on 22nd July 1915. Our apartment was on the first floor of a three-storied building, owned by Karolina Korotkevich, a Polish woman. Karolina occupied a big three-bedroom apartment in the building. She owned a few houses in Podol. She was an older woman and had an executive manager to resolve all issues. They were small and shabby apartments that were rented by people with low income.

In the bigger room of our apartment there was an ancient wardrobe, a carved cupboard, a table and chairs, a sofa and a couch, where my sister and I were sleeping. In my parents' bedroom there were two beds. This furniture belonged to Karolina, but my father bought it from her piece by piece. There was a big stove in the kitchen. My mother cooked on it and baked bread. There was also a huge table there. My father worked at it. The Singer sewing machine was also there. After Abram lost his shop my father began to work at home. He became a highly professional ladies' tailor. He had many clients. My mother was helping my father with the ironing, lining and basting the parts together. I still have an image of it in my head: my father and mother working in the kitchen under the light of a kerosene lamp. We only got electricity in the middle of the 1920s. After the revolution the Soviet power dispossessed our landlady and forced her to move out of her apartment. The big family of a Bolshevik called Mikhailov moved into her apartment. Old Karolina got a small apartment in another street. Our apartment became state property.

During the revolution and the Civil War, when the power in Kiev was switching from the Reds [5](#), the Whites [6](#) and Denikin units [7](#) to military units of Simon Petliura [8](#), there were many pogroms in town. My mother took my sister and me to our grandmother Riva and grandfather Haim in Chernobyl. There were also bandits in Chernobyl, and we had to hide either in the attic or in the

cellar of our grandparents' house. My sister was older and aware of the fearful reality. I didn't understand why we had to sit in the cellar when there were beautiful fields, woods and the Pripiat River outside. We stayed in Chernobyl for almost a year. When the Soviet power was established in Kiev we returned to Kiev. My grandfather Haim died in the early 1920s. My grandmother Riva visited us in Kiev several times when my mother was still alive. When the war began, and my mother's brothers, Meyr and Zisl, were preparing for evacuation, they decided to leave my grandmother behind. They didn't think that anybody would harm an old woman. She stayed in Chernobyl and was shot by the fascists in October 1941 along with other Jews in town.

My parents, and especially my father, were very religious. On Saturdays and on holidays my father went to the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street while my mother and I waited for him at home. Every day he put on his tallit and prayed. On Friday my mother made a festive dinner for Saturday: stuffed fish, chicken broth and challah. In the evening we changed our clothes and got together at the table watching my mother light candles and my father say a prayer. My parents didn't work on Saturday. In the evening we all sat at the table to celebrate Sabbath. We also celebrated all Jewish holidays. I remember my parents buying matzah and bringing it home in big baskets, covered with white cloth. We also had special Pesach dishes that mother took out before the holiday. Mother also did a general clean-up of the house before the holiday. She cleaned the windows and hung fancy linen curtains. She covered the table with white crocheted starched tablecloth. My mother did everything herself and managed fine - we never had any help for the housekeeping.

My mother believed that Pesach was the most important Jewish holiday. She cooked the best food: fish, chicken, chicken broth with dumplings, rich stew and lots of pastries. There were dishes made from matzah on the table and sweet kosher wine that my father bought in the Jewish kosher store. My father conducted the seder telling us about the exodus of Jews from Egypt, about their journey across the desert under the guidance of Moses. My father used to hide a small piece of matzah, and my sister and I had to find it. We celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Purim and Chanukkah. My parents fasted on Yom Kippur. Sometimes we got invitations from Uncle Abram. When we grew up he took to liking my sister and me. He only had sons, and he always wanted to have a daughter. At Chanukkah Abram always invited us, gave my sister and me some money and treated us to candy and chocolates.

I began to study at a Russian school when I was 8, although there was a Jewish school in our neighborhood. Genia also studied at this school. Our parents always wanted us to get a higher education, and all higher educational institutions were Russian. Therefore we studied at the Russian school to avoid language problems in the future. There were Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish children at school. My classmates were very nice. We didn't care about nationality. We also had teachers of different nationalities. We were taught by our parents and teachers that all people were equal. My favorite subject was history. I also liked Ukrainian literature. Our teacher was Olga Kosach, the sister of a great Ukrainian poetess, Lesia Ukrainka [9](#). She told us a lot about Lesia and her attitude towards people. She had many friends of various nationalities. Olga was my favorite teacher.

I became a Young Octobrist [10](#), and a pioneer when I was in 4th grade. We were admitted to the pioneers in Kreschatik in the center of Kiev, near the monument of Karl Marx. My father and mother supported all our hobbies. My mother made me a fancy white blouse and a blue skirt on the occasion of my admission to the pioneers. We went to parades on 1st of May and October

Revolution Day [11](#). My parents didn't celebrate state holidays. They followed the Jewish traditions and celebrated Jewish holidays. But they didn't have anything against our enthusiastic attitude towards the ideas of communism. We respected and understood the fact that our parents celebrated Jewish holidays. However, we secretly believed them to be retrogrades in their faith.

In winter 1931 my mother fell ill. She had a weak heart, but she tried to ignore it. But that time she was taken to hospital. She died of an infarction soon afterwards. My mother was taken from the morgue of the hospital to the cemetery, and no Jewish rituals were observed. But the rabbi said the last prayer over her grave. The cemetery was a few kilometers from town, and we walked all the way. My father was crying and grieving, but after a few months he brought another Jewish woman into the house and married her. My stepmother's name was Sorl, and she was the complete opposite of my mother. She was wicked and greedy. My sister Genia finished a course in something, I forget what it was exactly, and got a job as a secretary at the Kievenergo company. Genia was straightforward and tough when she was young, and she said that she couldn't stay at home with our stepmother. Genia moved to our mother's younger sister, Zlata. I stayed with my father because I felt sorry for him. He always tried to give me some money or food, but he always tried to do it so that my stepmother wouldn't notice.

In 1931 I finished 7th grade and went to work at the garment factory. I was a laborer. In 1933 there was a famine [12](#) in Ukraine, caused by the Bolsheviks. The situation in Kiev was a bit better than in other Ukrainian towns and villages, and many people came here looking for jobs and food. In the mornings, on my way to work, I often saw people sitting or lying in a park. It was hard to say whether they were dead or alive. At that time Sorl stopped giving me any food, although I gave my father part of my wages. I often went to Aunt Zlata for dinner. She cooked delicious meals, even in those hard times.

In autumn 1934 I entered the Rabfak [13](#), a school for young working people, at Kiev State University to finish my secondary education. In order to enter a higher educational institution I needed to complete my secondary education. During the day I worked at the garment factory in Podol, and in the evening I went to school, which was located in the city center near the university. I finished school and entered the Faculty of History at Kiev State University in 1937. There was no anti-Semitism back then. I passed all exams and was admitted.

I liked to study. I quit work and received a small stipend. My father divorced Sorl. Genia married Bencion Obomelik, an engineer. He was her colleague. She moved in with her husband. My father worked, I received a stipend, and we could manage all right. I had many friends at university. We didn't care about nationality. We just didn't think about it. We celebrated Soviet holidays and went to the cinema or theater together. I became a Komsomol [14](#) member.

I studied ancient history, the Middle Ages and contemporary history at the university. I was always fond of history. We spent much time studying Marx, Engels and Lenin. We also studied works by Stalin about the building of communism in our country and the advantages of communist society. I spent much time at the central library. Once the librarian gave me Lenin's 'Letter to the Congress' in which he criticized Stalin, his rudeness and ruthlessness, and recommended not to elect him General Secretary of the Party. She probably gave me this work by mistake. This was sensitive information at the time and only became known to the public after the denunciation of the cult of Stalin [at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party] [15](#). This work implanted strong

doubts in the official propaganda of Stalin, stating that he was a follower of Lenin's ideas and his integral friend. I kept my doubts to myself. It wasn't safe to share such ideas at the time. It was in 1937 when arrests of leading party and government officials began. [The interviewee is referring to the Great Terror.] [16](#) The authorities also arrested common people. One word or joke was enough to make accusations against innocent people.

We read in newspapers and heard on the radio about the arrests of political leaders. We, Komsomol members, had ultimate trust in the Soviet power, but we were shocked and didn't know what to believe anymore. We thought that it was true if newspapers wrote about such things, because we thought the Soviet power wouldn't lie to its people. Our university lecturers also suffered from repression. At some time we even had a visiting lecturer from Moscow to teach us, because there were no specialists left at the university. Yanolskiy, a history teacher, another history teacher, both Jews, a geography teacher and many others were arrested. They were accused of the distortion of the guidelines of the party and the government, betrayal of communist ideas and God knows what other sins. These were all talented teachers and honest and true party members. Some of them came back, others vanished in Stalin's camps.

There was an old history teacher called Konstantin Shtefa. He was German and a communist. In 1938 he was arrested and kept behind prison bars for two or three months. He was released later, but he didn't return to the university. During the war Shtefa lived under occupation. He became editor of the newspaper *Kievlianin* [17](#), which was a speaking-tube of the fascists. Shtefa disclosed his anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic self. He condemned the 'zhydy-and-Bolshevik' power, and appealed to Kievites to support Germans and report on Jews, Bolsheviks and partisans. When the Germans were retreating Shtefa left with them. He moved to America. He died there in 1958. Shtefa's son was arrested after the war. He didn't agree with his father's views. He spent ten years in prison camps. He was released and rehabilitated later. He got married in Middle Asia and moved to Germany recently. I know all this from my neighbors. They had known this family.

In 1941 I did my last year at university. On 22nd June I went to university to take my final exam. I remember walking in the streets in the morning when all of a sudden I had a premonition of something terrible to happen. I didn't know that Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, but I walked enjoying the sights of Kiev, thinking that it could all be destroyed because a war was inevitable. When I came to the university building, everybody was listening to the speech of Molotov [18](#) on the radio. We passed our final exams, but we didn't receive our diplomas. Instead we obtained certificates of graduation from university. I obtained my diploma on the basis of this certificate when I returned to Kiev after the war.

My sister's husband, Bencion, was summoned to the army on the second day of the war. Genia and I decided that we had to evacuate, and Genia received a boat ticket for the evacuation of all members of her family. My father didn't want to leave. He was convinced that the Germans were civilized people and weren't going to do Jews any harm. He ignored whatever my sister and I told him and stayed in Kiev. Kiev was bombed, and we dug up a shelter in the yard where we could hide during air raids.

At the beginning of July we boarded the boat and sailed down the Dnieper River. There was my sister Genia, I, my Aunt Zlata and her son, and my three cousins: Sonia, Zina and Basia, the daughters of Aunt Rohl. Zina and Basia were single, and Sonia's husband was at the front. Sonia's

little son was also traveling with us. In Dnepropetrovsk we changed for a train heading to Krasnodarskiy region. We were traveling under terrible conditions - in freight railcars for coal transportation. Genia had brought her and her husband's clothes, and when the train stopped we got off to exchange clothes for food. We reached our destination and settled down in Nefyodovka village, in Krasnodarskiy region [about 1,500 km from Kiev]. I didn't want to stay there. There was no school in Nefyodovka, and I didn't have work. Genia and I went to Timashovskaya village. I worked for a few weeks at the local school. Aunt Zlata and her sisters stayed in Nefyodovka. When the Germans began to approach Krasnodar, they moved on to the Caucasus and settled down in Baku.

When we were in Timashovskaya we received a letter from my father. He wrote to us that Genia's husband Bencion Obomelik perished in the first weeks of the war, during the defense of Kiev. My father regretted that he hadn't gone with us.

Genia and I managed to leave Krasnodar when the Germans were very close. We stayed at the railway station several days and nights until we could get on a train. At the end of October 1941 we reached Chimkent in Kazakhstan. I was sent to work in one of the villages in South Kazakhstan. I worked there for a few weeks until I was summoned to the regional education department where they told me that I was to be replaced by a Kazakh teacher. I was sent to the Russian village of Pervomayskoye. Genia and I stayed in this village until 1944. Life was very hard. We didn't have anything to sell and were starving. I had a very small salary, and Genia worked at the collective farm receiving some cards that couldn't be exchanged for anything. Genia went to the mill where she could get some grain wastes. We made bread from them. Later we got a plot of land to grow vegetables. It saved us. We were fighting to survive during evacuation and didn't have any possibility to observe Jewish traditions.

In 1944 we decided to return to Kiev. It was necessary to receive a residence permit [19](#) for Kiev to go there. It was the period of the beginning of anti-Semitism, and Genia and I couldn't obtain any permit. We left for Kiev without any permit.

Our neighbors told us how my father perished. When Kiev was occupied by the fascists, Sorl's sisters, Lisa and Ania, came to him. They thought it would be easier for them to live through the occupation if they were together. On 29th September, when all Jews from Kiev were taken to Babi Yar, my father, Lisa and Ania stayed at home. They decided to hide, but the wife of an old Bolshevik, Mikhailov, one of their neighbors, reported on them. At the beginning of October 1941 the police came to take them to Babi Yar.

There were other people living in our apartment. Veterans of the war and widows of those who perished at the front had a priority in getting accommodations, so I understood that I shouldn't expect to get an apartment soon. Genia couldn't prove that her husband had perished at the front. My father had a death notification but it vanished, of course. Genia got a job at the company where she had worked before the war and received a room at the hostel. We couldn't prove that we were from Kiev and couldn't obtain a residence permit. Genia got registered at the hostel. I obtained a residence permit to reside with the daughter of my father's brother Lazar.

In 1944, when we returned to Kiev, I went to work at a Russian secondary school in the center of the city. I was a history teacher at this school for 30 years. In 1946 I married Abram Zeltser. We met at the polyclinic when he came to visit a dentist. He was a Jew and a war invalid. I wanted my

sister to sort out her personal life and wanted to move out. Abram was a very ill and selfish man, and our marriage lasted less than a year. We divorced in 1947, and I returned to my sister in the hostel. I didn't see him again. He died in the early 1950s. Genia stayed single and we lived together.

In 1948 Genia received a room in a communal apartment. In the middle of the 1950s she managed to obtain the certificate that said that her husband had perished at the front, and we received a small apartment.

The first years after the war were extremely difficult. It was as difficult as in evacuation. I didn't even have clothes for work. Kievenergo, the company where my sister was working, received humanitarian aid from the USA, and I got a coat. Life was slowly improving. We didn't earn much, but we managed somehow.

Life was very difficult in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the period of anti-Semitic campaigns: the Doctors' Plot [20](#) and the struggle against anti-Semitism. Everywhere - on the radio, in newspapers, on public transport and in stores - Jews were abused. Many of them lost their jobs and had to leave Kiev. Our collective at school was very good, and I didn't face any abuse at work. We had a very good director, and his deputy was a very nice intellectual, too. We had to discuss the current documents issued by the Party at party meetings at school, but it was a mere formality. I didn't become a party member. It was a verbal requirement of the officials that history teachers had to be communists. I didn't want to become a communist, because I believed that communists and Stalin caused our country lots of troubles. They couldn't force me to become a party member and I had excellent performance records, so the authorities just left me alone.

In 1953 Stalin died. People around were crying and so was I. We were crying out of fear of the future. The 20th Congress denounced the cult of Stalin. We [history teachers] were kind of at a loss. We didn't know what we were supposed to tell the students. Later we attended workshops and had school programs changed, allowing us to speak about what Stalinism was like openly. We spoke half-truths about the crimes of Stalin and about the lack of principles of his companions, but we never had any doubts about the correctness of the idea of communism. We were telling children that they were the happiest children living in the best country in the world, in the country of socialism, when children in capitalist countries were starving and dying from hard work.

I remember very well the vacuum accumulated around Jews during the Six-Day- War [21](#) war in Israel. There were six Jewish teachers in our school, and we discussed the situation in Israel silently behind closed doors and with phone receivers removed from the phones for security reasons. One of our colleagues had a sister in Israel that had lived there since the 1920s. She told us emigration to Israel was allowed. I tried to convince my sister to move to Israel, but she was a party member and a convinced communist. She was against emigration and believed that there could be nothing better than our communist motherland.

When Aunt Zlata and her son were leaving for Israel she condemned them and didn't even say good-bye to them. When our cousins Sonia, Basia and Zina were leaving for Israel Genia met with them in a park in Kiev. She was afraid that she could be seen by somebody and that they would report her to the party organization, because this might mean that she sympathized with them and supported them. At that time, one could be fired or expelled from the Party for that. My sister was afraid that she might be suspected of not being faithful to the ideals of communism.



Genia was a very active communist and secretary of the party organization. She dedicated her life to meetings, parades and so on. It didn't even occur to her that life might be different, that we were young and one could get married and have a family. Genia and I never got married again. We often went to the cinema and theater. Sometimes we went to sanatoriums and recreation homes. We celebrated Soviet holidays and went to parades. We have always been atheists. But, in the memory of our parents, we tried to remember Jewish holidays. I recall how, after the war, we stood in line to buy matzah at some private bakery. We kept observing Jewish traditions whenever we had the opportunity. We did it secretly. If somebody from Genia's party unit or my school had found out, we would have been fired or arrested. We couldn't celebrate Sabbath, because it was a working day at school. We've always fasted on Yom Kippur, remembering our relatives.

There is no anti-Semitism on a state level in independent Ukraine. We have all conditions for a renaissance of the Jewish nation. We are old people now. Genia is very ill. She is confined to bed, and as thin as a mummy. She's like a vegetable now.

Hesed provides great assistance to us. We get food packages and parcels. Besides, a nurse attends to my sister every day. I read Jewish newspapers and watch the Yahad program [22](#) on TV. I can say that I'm happy to see the Jewish way of life restored in Ukraine. I wish it weren't so late for my sister and me.

Glossary

## **1 Great Patriotic War**

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

## **2 Podol**

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

## **3 Babi Yar**

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

## **4 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the October Revolution and the Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the

planned economy.

## **5 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

## **6 White Guards**

A counter-revolutionary gang led by General Denikin, famous for their brigandry and anti-Semitic acts all over Russia; legends were told of their cruelty. Few survived their pogroms.

## **7 Denikin, Anton Ivanovich (1872-1947)**

White Army general. During the Civil War he fought against the Red Army in the South of Ukraine.

## **8 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

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

## **9 Ukrainka, Lesia (1871-1913)**

Ukrainian poet and dramatist. Ukrainka spent most of her life abroad struggling to recuperate from tuberculosis. Her principal plays, using themes from Western and classical literature, include Cassandra (1908) and In the Desert (1909). The Forest Song (1912) is her dramatic poem based on Slavic mythology.

## **10 Young Octobrist**

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

## **11 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.

## **12 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the

rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

### **13 Rabfak**

Educational institutions for young people without secondary education, specifically established by the Soviet power.

### **14 Komsomol**

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

### **15 Twentieth Party Congress**

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

### **16 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **17 Kievlianin**

This newspaper was published by Germans during their occupation of Kiev from 1941-1943.

### **18 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **19 Residence permit**

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

## **20 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.

## **21 Six-Day-War**

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on June 5th, 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

## **22 Yahad program**

Weekly Jewish program on Ukrainian national television.