

Dina Orlova

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Chernovtsy

Ukraine

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Dina Orlova, her daughter, son and granddaughter live in an old two-storied house where Dina's family settled down after World War II. The house is located in a quiet neighborhood of private houses in the center of Chernovtsy. There is a small yard with old trees and a flower garden close to the house. There are three rooms and a kitchen. The house needs to be renovated, but the family cannot afford it. Dina and her daughter Svetlana are fond of growing plants in the house. Dina is a big woman of average height. She has a wonderful smile. She wasn't well when I came, but she insisted on giving this interview regardless of her condition. Dina is a sociable lady. She is a wonderful cook and knows many recipes of traditional and rare Jewish dishes. They observe Jewish traditions and celebrate Shabbat and Jewish holidays. There is an atmosphere of warmth, love and care in the family. Dina spends a lot of time with her 6-year-old granddaughter Milana.

I don't know much about my father's family. His parents lived in the town of Ozarintsy, Vinnitsa region. My grandfather, Bertl Roizen, was born in Ozarintsy in the 1860s. My grandmother, Dina Roizen, came from Ozarintsy, too. She died during an epidemic of cholera I was named after her. I spent my childhood in this picturesque town. There was a stream in the nearby forest where the water was ice-cold, even in hot summers. It's hard to find words to describe the beauty of the area. The majority of the population in town was Jewish, the rest was Ukrainian. Jews spoke Yiddish. Ukrainians also spoke Yiddish, adding Ukrainian words. There were no communication problems between Jews and Ukrainians. Both nations respected religion and their different ways of life. Jews lived like one big family. They celebrated weddings and birthdays together. There was a synagogue, cheder and a Jewish school.

My grandfather was a tradesman, but my father didn't tell me any details about his business. My grandmother was a housewife. I don't know exactly how many children they had. It was quite common in Russia for Jewish families with many children to give one of the sons up for adoption by childless relatives. An only son, even if he was just adopted, wasn't subject to service in the army. That way Jews kept boys from service in the tsarist army. My father told me that one or two of his brothers were given up for adoption, but they still lived nearby. I only know a few of his siblings the children. My father, Mendel-Bertl Roizen, the oldest child, was born in 1885. Next were his brother Velvl, born in 1887, and Joseph, born in 1890. The only girl, Sheindl, was born in 1895. The last boy in the family was named Don. He was born in 1900, and Grandmother Dina died at his birth. Don was given up for adoption. Long before the Revolution of 1917 [1](#) his adoptive parents moved to the US with him. During the Great Patriotic War [2](#) he wrote to my father [1](#). At that time correspondence with relatives abroad [3](#) wasn't allowed. My father didn't reply, and Don never got in touch with us again.

My grandparents were religious. My father told me that they went to the synagogue on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. They celebrated/observed Shabbat/Sabbath and Jewish holidays. They spoke Yiddish. The sons went to cheder.

My grandfather Bertl had a gray beard. He was a slim man of average height. He wore dark clothes, a black silk yarmulkeyarmulka at home and a black hat when going out. He was a reserved and taciturn man and often prayed in his room. He had a phenomenal memory and remembered all events and dates. There was a well in the yard, and my grandfather calculated the quantity of needles or wheat grains that would fit into it. In 1937 my grandfather fell ill and died in hospital in Mohilev-Podolsk. He was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery in Ozarintsy.

My father liked dancing. He attended a dance club in Ozarintsy where children learned Jewish folk dances and other dances. They even went on tour to Mohilev-Podolsk. My father had to give up dancing after his mother died., bHe was the oldest son and had to help his grandfather raise the children after his mother's death. He didn't finish cheder because he had to work. I don't know where my father worked. I know that he liked dancing. He attended a dance club in Ozarintsy where children learned Jewish folk and other dances. Children even went on tour to Mogilyov-Podolskiy. My father had to give up dancing after his mother died. My fatherHe must have had a hard childhood. Later he didn't allow us, children, to leave bread leftovers. He told us, 'I know what it's like to be hungry'. My father had a beautiful handwriting. He could read and write in Yiddish and Russian and had a good command of Hebrew. I don't know who taught him.

All I know about my father's later work is that he became a merchant of Guild II [34](#) before the Russian Revolution of 1917. He traded with Germany and other countries supplying food products. He was a respectable and wealthy man. He had a big house in Ozarintsy. After the Revolution, the Soviet authorities nationalized my father's store and storehouses. My father was imprisoned,. Bbut released after two weeks. I didn't know then, why he was imprisoned. I guess the Soviet authorities wanted to get some money from him that way. My father didn't tell us any details.

My father's brother Velvl lived in Ozarintsy. During the Soviet regime he worked on a cattle farm and was soon promoted to the manager's position. His wife died and left Velvl and their two children, Dina and Michael, behind. The children were raised in our family. Velvl got remarried to a Jewish woman from Pechora, Vinnitsa region. They had a baby, but then something went wrong with the marriage, and Velvl's wife left him and went back to Pechora. She and the baby perished in the death camp in Pechora during the war. [Editor's note: Pechora was one of the biggest concentration camps in Vinnitsa region and also known as 'The Dead Loop'.] After the Great Patriotic War Velvl moved to Omsk in Russia. He died there after a surgery in the 1980s.

My father's brother Joseph lived in Mogilev, Belarus. He was married to a Jewish woman and had a son, Semyon, and a daughter, Dina, named after my grandmother. I don't know what Joseph did for a living. After evacuation his family settled down in Lvov. Joseph died in 1972, and his children have passed away by now, too.

My father's sister Sheindl married a Jewish man from Bessarabia [5](#) in the 1920s and moved to his town. They had two children. Sheindl was a housewife. During the Great Patriotic War my father lost track of her, and after the war he couldn't find anyone of her family. They must have perished in some ghetto in Transnistria [6](#). My father's sister Sheindl married a Jewish man from Bessarabia in

1920s and moved to his town. They had two children. Sheindl was a housewife. During the GPW my father lost track of her and after the war he couldn't find anybody of heris family. They must have perished in the ghetto in Transnistria [45](#).

My mother's parents lived in Murafa village, Vinnitsa region. My grandfather, Velvl Velikiy, was born in 1869. His Ukrainian neighbors called him Volko. My grandmother, Gitl Velikaya, was born in Murafa in 1861. I don't remember her neemaide name. Her first husband was a teacher at cheder. Something went wrong in the marriage and they got divorced. Grandfather Velvl was her second husband. When they got married she was 30 and my grandfather was 22. Grandfather said that all guys in the village were envious when he married Gitl. She was a tiny woman with a thin waist. She made clothes herself and liked to dress up. She knew Hebrew and was religious. Grandmother sang at the synagogueShe sang prayers in Hebrew at the synagogue and other women joined in with her.

My grandmother's sisters, Dvoira and Manya, lived in Shargorod. They were married but had no children. They visited my grandmother several times, and I met them but can hardly remember them. They seemed very old women to me. They wore black clothes. The sisters were very close. My grandmother's other sister, Ratsl, and her husband Mordkhe lived in Ozarintsy.

My grandparents lived in a small house with earthen floors. The front door opened to a hallway from which a door led into athe living room and athe kitchen. My grandparents had a bedroom with whitewashed walls. There was a small backyard with a shed where my grandmother kept a cow and chickens. She also kept goats because she believed that goat milk was very nutritious. In the winter she took the goats into the house to keep them warm. She tied them to her bed. There were apple trees and a cherry tree close to the house. My grandfather was the manager of a fish farm at a Russian count's estate before the Revolution of 1917. The count had ponds and sold fish. My grandmother was a housewife. The family had enough food to make a good living.

Jews constituted more than half of the population of Murafa. JewsThey lived in the central part of town where land was more expensive. They had small plots of land near their houses. The Ukrainian and Russian population lived on the outskirts where they had fields and cattle farms. Jews were involved in crafts and trades. They were bakers, millers, shoemakers, tailors, locksmiths, tinsmiths etc, etc. There was also a shoihetshochet in Murafa in Murafa. After the Revolution Jews thatwho had businesses went to work on the collective farm [7](#). There was a big synagogue in Murafa and a cheder in Murafa. Jews in Murafa lived like one big family. They never sent special invitations to a wedding party: all the Jews came anyway. Wedding parties lasted several days, and Ukrainians also came to pass their regards to the newly-weds. There were no national conflicts in town. From 1917-1922 there were occasional pogroms [86](#). Jews were hiding at such times, and sometimes their Ukrainian neighbors offered them shelter in their houses.

My grandparents were religious followingand observed all religious laws. My grandmother wore a wig; and when she grew very old she wore a kerchief. She wore long dark skirts and blouses with long sleeves. Only in summer she put on brighter blouses, but they were also long-sleeved. My grandfather wore a dark jacket and dark shirts, a hat when going out and a yarmulkeyarmulka at home.

My mother told me that my grandmother strictly followed the kashrut. They celebratedobserved ShabbatSabbath. My grandmother and her daughters did all the cooking for ShabbatSabbath. The

house was kept immaculately clean. They clayed the floors once a week, and whitewashed the walls once a month. They cooked gefilte fish and baked fish and chicken broth with farfelakh for ShabbatSabbath. My grandmother put big ceramic pots with cholent and tsyimes with carrots and beans into the oven on Fridays. On Friday evenings the family got together for a prayer. My grandmother lit candles and said a prayer over them, wearing her best dress. Then the family said a prayer and sat down for a festive dinner.

Before Pesach there was a major clean-up of the house. Special dishes and utensils were taken down from the attic. Matszah was bought before Pesach since the family didn't have any bread for the eight days of Pesach. On Purim children took part in Purimshpil performances with the neighbor's children. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the family fasted. My mother told me about how her family celebrated Jewish holidays. I don't remember any details now but their celebration of holidays was very much like in our family. I only recall ShabbatSabbath at my grandparents'. Nobody worked on Saturdays. A Ukrainian neighbor came to light a kerosene lamp and make fire in the stove. In the morning my grandparents went to the synagogue. When they returned my grandfather read a section from the Torah.

My grandparents had three daughters and a son. My mother Nehuma, the oldest daughter, was born in 1897. Donia was born in 1899, Joseph in 1902, and Golda, the youngest, in 1904. All children knew Hebrew. I don't know where they studied it, though. My grandmother had books in Hebrew. They were religious books and books about healing. Both Jews and Ukrainians from town came to seek my grandmother's advice if they had health problems. Later she also healed her grandchildren if they got sick. My grandmother picked and dried herbs to make decoctions.

My mother went to Russian secondary school because there was no Jewish secondary school in Murafa. The tsarist government didn't allow Jewish children to study at this school. It was only for local non-Jewish kids. However, the count, my grandfather's employer, went to the director of the school and asked him to admit my mother. My mother was a very industrious pupil. Later other Jewish children were also allowed to go to school. My mother finished secondary school in 1916.

My mother was the first of the sisters to get married. My grandmother Gitl was a distant relative of my father's mother Dina. A matchmaker offered my father to meet a girl from Kopaygorod. Once my father, his brother Velvl and some friends went to Kopaygorod. They stayed there until late in the evening, and since a snowstorm was approaching my father suggested to stay in Murafa overnight, in the house of his relative, my grandmother Gitl. My father told her about the purpose of his trip, and my grandmother said they didn't have to go anywhere else because she had a beauty of a daughter. My mother and father liked one another. They got married in 1921. My father was 12 years older than my mother. He arranged a great wedding party in Shargorod. My parents had a traditional wedding with a chuppah in the synagogue. My father rented a café for the wedding party. After the wedding my father took my mother to his house in Ozarintsy.

My mother's sister Donia married a Jewish man called Zukelman from Mohilev-Podolsk. They had two children. Donia was a housewife. Her husband worked on the collective farm. After the Great Patriotic War he was logistics manager in a hospital. Donia died in 1980.

My mother's younger sister, Golda, married a Jewish man from Murafa. They lived with Golda's parents. They had a daughter. Her husband perished at the front during World War II. After the war Golda married a Jewish man called Eidelman from Khmel'nitskiy. He was in the ghetto in

Khmelnitskiy with his family. His family perished, but he managed to escape. Golda had two daughters with him. They lived in Khmelnitskiy. At the end of her life Golda was confined to bed for 20 years. She died in 1992. After her death her husband and his daughters moved to Israel.

My mother's brother Joseph married a Jewish girl from Zhmerinka. He moved to his wife and worked on the collective farm. They had two children. During the war Joseph and his family were in the ghetto in Murafa with my grandparents. After the war they returned to Zhmerinka. Joseph died in 1978.

My grandfather Velvl died in 1938. He was buried in accordance with the Jewish tradition in the Jewish cemetery in Murafa. My parents and my older brother went to the funeral, but I stayed at home. Grandmother Gitl lived the rest of her life with her younger daughter Golda and her family.

My parents settled down in the biggest house in Ozarintsy, a big stone house with wooden floors. the biggest house in Ozarintsy. There were 11 rooms in the house: my parents' bedroom, a big living room and two children's rooms. There were several guest rooms and a big room where almost all inhabitants of Ozarintsy had their wedding parties. There was an orchard near the house and a big yard with sheds and a well that my father had made. My parents kept two cows, at least 20 sheep, chickens, geese and turkeys. My father, my brother and I helped my mother to take care of the livestock. There was a machine for making butter. My mother made butter and other dairy products herself. She was a housewife. She didn't keep housemaids, but twice a week Russian women came to help her with the cleaning and laundry. My father went to work in the collective farm. He was a cheese maker and later went to work at the My father became a selectionist and developed a breed of sheep that produced fur that was good quality for export. My father took part in exhibition in Moscow and got an award for his work. My father brought my mother the first in Ozarintsy record player from Moscow. My father was a fighter. He never fell in despair if things went wrong and always found a way our even if he had to start thing from zero.

My older brother was born in 1927. My mother named him Oosher after Grandmother Gitl's father. I was born in 1933, and my father named me Dina after his mother.

My parents spoke Yiddish in the family. We communicated in Yiddish with Jewish children and Ukrainian - with our Ukrainian neighbors' children. Twice a week, on Monday and Friday, there was a market in the town center where people went to do their shopping and socialize. My mother went there to do the shopping and talk with her acquaintances, too. On holidays all Jews dressed up to go to the synagogue. Men wore black suits and hats, and women wore their best clothes and silk shawls.

My mother told me that when my brother was still a baby my father was arrested again and put into prison in Mohilev-Podolsk. Authorities demanded money and gold from him. My mother walked 10 kilometers with the baby to see him there. He stayed in prison for several days. He didn't give money to the authorities but was released nonetheless. During the collectivization [79](#) my father was one of the first to join and work on the collective farm. He was a cheese maker and worked very hard. He got up at 4am to milk the cows and sheep and make sheep cheese. The sheep cheese that he made was sold at the market in Mohilev-Podolsk. Later my father bred a special breed of sheep that produced fur, which was good quality for export. My father took part in exhibitions in Moscow and got an award for his work. He brought my mother a record player from Moscow, which was the first record player in Ozarintsy. My father was a fighter. He never fell in

despair if things went wrong and always found a way out, even if he had to start things from zero. My parents kept food stocks for winter: sauerkraut, marinated apples and pickles. A lot of jam was made, and the children were responsible for removing stones from berries. After the harvest season my father received grain from the collective farm. The grain was ground at the mill, and my mother made bread from this flour.

My mother told me about the famine of 1932-33 [the famine in Ukraine] [810]. She wanted my grandmother to come to live with us, but my grandmother refused because my father kept a pig, and thus our home wasn't kosher. My mother helped her Ukrainian neighbors and Jewish relatives by sharing food with them.

My mother made food on Fridays. She cooked food for two days since it wasn't allowed to light the fire on Saturdays. She made gefilte fish, two loaves of challah and cholent in a pot, which she put into the oven. Cholent was very delicious when it was taken out of the oven on the following day. My mother also made pancakes and baked strudel. On Friday evenings she put on her fancy dress, lit candles and said a prayer over them. My father came home after work on Friday evenings and had dinner with the family. He had to work on the collective farm on Saturdays, and my mother had to take care of our live-stock.

We celebrated/observed Jewish holidays. Our favorite holiday was Pesach. Special dishes and utensils were taken down from the attic. Sometimes we didn't have enough Pesach utensils, and my mother koshered everyday kitchen utensils so that we could use them for Pesach. They were cleaned with water and scrubbed with sand and ash before they were boiled in a big bowl with stones inside. The Soviet authorities closed the Jewish bakery, but Jewish women got together to bake matzah in the house across the street where we lived. We didn't have any bread at home on Pesach. We had matszah made for our family from one pood [16 kg] of flour. A special motselakhmotselah [round flat matszah cookie] was made for children. There was flour made from matsahmatzah in a mortar with a wooden pestle. The flour was sieved and what was left in the sieve my mother used for making dumplings for chicken broth. She made cakes, sponge cakes, bagels, fluden and cookies from matsahmatzah flour. She had special patterns for cookies: menorah shaped, magen David/mogenduid, tree-shaped, etc. There was also keyzl matsah and potato pancakes. Mother made chicken broth, meat stew and sweet and sour stew, mamalyga, cutlets with garlic sauce and gefilte fish. It took her a while to make all this food, but the family helped her. In the morning my parents went to the synagogue, and in the evening my father conducted seder. There were koyseskoisi for each member of the family and one for Elijah, the Prophet [9](#). My father had the biggest cup, we, children, had smaller cups. Adults had kosher wine and children had a little of it, too. My brother posed the traditional four questions [the mah nishtanah] in Yiddish to my father. My father responded in Hebrew. Then my father read from the Bible and we sang songs in Yiddish. My mother knew many of them, and they were beautiful songs. My father hid the afikoman, and one of the children had to find it. The afikoman was given back to my father for redemption.

On Yom Kippur my mother said a prayer during the kapores ritual at home, and my brother and I repeated her words. My parents fasted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In my mother's opinion my brother and I were too young to fast in our mother's opinion. I was 5-6 years old then.

On Chanukkah my mother lit one more candle in the Chanukah chanukkiyah every day. My brother and I got Chanukkah gelt. On Purim my mother made hamantashen, very delicious triangle pies stuffed with poppy seeds and nuts: gumentashen. Our father told us in Yiddish about the history and traditions of this holiday in Yiddish. On Sukkotah we used a room with a folding ceiling, which my mother decorated with ribbons and green branches. We had meals in this room.

I was eager to go to school. There was a Jewish elementary school in Ozarintsy. When my brother started to go to school I went with him. The teacher sent me home telling me that I was too young to go to school. I went to Uncle Mordkhe. He was husband of my grandmother's sister Ratsl. He didn't have any children and was always happy to see me. Mordkhe had a good education. He knew Hebrew very well, .so Hhe began to teach me Hebrew. My mother got rather scared when she heard about it .because the Soviet authorities persecuted such activities [during their struggle against religion] [11](#). My mother forbade me to study Hebrew. I wish she hadn't. I learned to read and write in Yiddish instead. My parents spoke Yiddish in the family. We communicated in Yiddish with Jewish children and in Ukrainian with our Ukrainian neighbors' children.

I was admitted to the Jewish elementary school at the age of 6.5 1/2 although the standard age was 8. It was an ordinary school except that all subjects were taught in Yiddish. We didn't study Hebrew or religion. I liked studying and was awas successful at school. We studied general subjects and were also taught moral principles. Our teacher came to the children's homes to check if a pupil helped his parents about the house. We had wonderful teachers! We attended a biology club under the supervision of our teacher Krivitskiy. We went to the woods to have practical classes. I was an industrious pupil. When I was in the 1st grade our teacher gave us books to read during the week and talk about its contents afterwards. I knew these books by heart.

We often visited my grandmother and grandfather in Murafa. My brother and I spent our vacations there. I always looked forward to these trips. ? I had many friends in Murafa. I was a naughty girl, I liked climbing trees and ride horses, which were at the collective farm. Sometimes we were riding to the lake with my father.

I finished two years of school before World War II. We heard about the beginning of the war through Molotov's [12](#) speech on the radio [11](#). Almost right away our retreating troops left and German troops arrived in Ozarintsy. On the first day of the occupation the Germans took all Jews to the synagogue. They took 20 men and shot them near the town on theat same day. The Germans were going to set the synagogue on fire. I don't know what stopped them from doing it. In these first two days the local population robbed Jewish homes. When we returned home, two days later, we learned that our neighbor, whom my mother had given food during the famine, had taken away our feather mattress and sewing machine. Only shortly before the end of the war, when it was clear that the Soviet troops would return, did she bring them back to us.

After some time the Germans left andRumanians Romanians came to the village instead. They fenced the Jewish neighborhood in the center of the village with barbed wire and set up guard posts. We were told that this was the area of the Jewish ghetto and that we weren't allowed to leave it. Our house was in the ghetto. It was possible to make arrangements with RumaniansRomanians or bribe them. RumaniansRomanians took men to work in stone quarries. A Jewish community was established in the ghetto and the chairman of this community was responsible for making lists of employees to work in the quarries. My father and brother were also

taken to the quarry, but they ran away from there. We made a shelter for them in the house: We barricaded the door to a small children's room with a cupboard so that one couldn't tell that there was a room there. One night RumaniansRomanians came to look for my father and brother. My mother was in bed with a high fever. RumaniansThey took me to their quarters. It was winter. I didn't have any warm clothes on. RumaniansThey beat me trying to find out where my father and brother were. In the end they left me alone, and I got back home somehow. When my father and brother heard that the RumaniansRomanians had come to look for them, they got out through the window and hid in ravines on the outskirts of the village. There were Jews from Moldavia and Bessarabia taken to Ozarintsy. They were accommodated in local houses. We also had few families residing in our house.

When the RumaniansRomanians came to the village they took away all our food and livestock. We were starving at the beginning. I remember how happy I was when somebody gave my mother an egg and she passed it on to me. There were times when we didn't have anything to eat for two or three days. My mother and I began to knit socks and gloves for villagers to earn some food. Later my mother got a few chickens. Then the raids were over, and my father and brother could stop hiding. My father remembered how Mordkhe had made soap and began to make soap himself. He got caustic soda from Mohilev- Podolsk and fat from the shoihetshochet. There were two shoihetshochetim in the village, and they were operating. Soap was very valuable at the time. Inmates of the ghetto had lice and there was no other place to buy soap. My father supplied all neighboring villages with soap.

Sometimes my mother and I went to do work in the field. Once I had my fingers pulled into a threshing-machine. I still have a scar from this injury. We got a meal and some food from farmers to take home with us. Once working on a threshing machine I had my fingers pulled inside the machine. I still have a sign of this injury. So, we weren't starving to death, but we never had enough to eat either. Many inmates of the ghetto were starved to death or died of spotted fever and typhoid. Jews from Moldavia and Bessarabia were taken to Ozarintsy. They were accommodated in local houses. We also had a few families residing in our house. There was a family of a tailor from Bessarabia, who lived in one of our rooms. The tailor fell ill with typhoid. My brother got infected when he looked after him. He had a high fever. There was a Ukrainian doctor in the village. His name was Stukalenko. [Editor's note: This doctor saved many Jews in Ozarintsy and other villages in Vinnitsa region. He came to Jewish houses at night and brought the inhabitants medication and treated them as best he could. Yad Vashkhem awarded Stukalenko with the title of the 'Righteous Among the Nations']. My parents stayed with my brother day and night. They didn't allow me to come close. My brother recovered.

There was no school in the ghetto, but I was still eager to study. I gathered other children in the ghetto, and we began to make clay bricks that we dried in the sun. Then we made a small 'doghouse' which was to serve us as a school building. Of course, this doghouse was too small and only three to four people could fit into it. When the number of us reached about 20 we studied outside or in somebody's home. We had a teacher thatwho was a young inmate of the ghetto. His name was Yuzia. The RumaniansRomanians shot him by accident on the road when they were retreating.

The inmates of the ghetto tried to observe traditions. Men prayed a lot; they gathered every day. Since we had the biggest house they got together there for a minyan. Of course we couldn't

celebrateobserve the holidays properly. I remember the most we could do was fast. We fasted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and prayed to God to liberate us.

In March 1944 the German and Rumanian troops began to retreat. The inmates of the ghetto were afraid that the RumaniansRomanians would exterminate them.inmates of the ghetto. Our family was hiding inin the houses of Ukrainian families. My mother and I stayed in one house, and my brother and father were in a house in the neighboring street. However, when the Germans came to Ozarintsythe village the mistress of the house in which my mother and I had found shelter got scared. She feared that her family might suffer if the Germans found two Jews in her house. She gave us some Ukrainian clothes, embroidered shirts and self-made skirts, and buckets and sent us to the well. We gave the impression of being Ukrainian women fetching water. We didn't look like Jews. When the Germans approached us and asked if we had seen any Jews we replied that we hadn't. When they left we didn't go back to that Ukrainian house. Instead, we went to the house in which my brother and father were hiding. We were terrified when we didn't find them there. Later it turned out that they had seen us through the window and went to another part of the village hiding in a ravine. My mother and I found them there and stayed in that ravine overnight. On the next day Soviet troops came to Ozarintsy. We welcomed them cordially and were happy to be liberated.

Later the sad memories of the lost ones overwhelmed us. Almost every Jewish family in Ozarintsy lost someone to the war. In the 1960s people collected money to install a monument for the Jews of Ozarinty who had perished in the ghetto or been exterminated by the Germans.

My parents went to Murafa after the war. They found out that Donia and her family and Joseph and his family had gone to Murafa at the beginning of the war. There was a Jewish ghetto in Murafa. A Christian priest lived across the street from my grandmother's. He respected my grandmother and her family and helped them to survive by bringing them flour, cereals and vegetables. The Christian church supported Jews during the war. After the war my grandmother moved in with Donia's family. Grandmother Gitl died in 1966 at the age of 105.???????? She was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions.

There was no Jewish school in Ozarintsy after the war, so my brother and I went to the Ukrainian school. In 1946 my brother finished school and went to Chernovtsy to enter the Construction College. During the war a family from Chernovtsy had lived in our house. My mother corresponded with them after the war and they told us to move to Chernovtsy. My mother went to Chernovtsy with my brother. She didn't want him to be on his own because of his poor health. My father and I stayed in Ozarintsy. I did the housekeeping and studied, and my father worked on the collective farm. My mother often came to visit us for a few days. Almost every Jewish family in Ozarintsy lost someone to the war. In 1960s people collected money to install a monument in Ozarintsy to Jews that perished in the ghetto or were exterminated by Germans.

I became a pioneer at school. It was quite a ceremony and a great holiday for me. We were patriots of our country. Lenin and Stalin were like gods to us. We learned poems and sang songs about them. We were firmly convinced that the Soviet Union had defeated fascism thanks to the leadership of Stalin. We always celebrated Soviet holidays, organized a concert and invited our parents to attend. In the 7th grade I became a Komsomol [13](#) member.

I finished lower secondary school with honors and decided to go to Chernovtsy to enter the cCollege of rRecords and Credits. In 1946 many Jews left Chernovtsy for RumaniaRomania or Israel.

Chernovtsy belonged to RumaniaRomania before 1939 and after the war Soviet authorities allowed all those that wanted to leave to do so. This lasted for about half a year. Then the border was closed for almost 40 years. I was surprised that people thatwho had prayed for Soviet troops to liberate them during the war were now running away from the Soviet country. They left their apartments, and officers thatwho returned from the front received them. My mother managed to find a room in a communal apartment [14](#), where she stayed with my brother. When I finished school my father and I moved to Chernovtsy and settled down in that room. We sold our house in Ozarintsy for peanuts because many people were moving to towns from villages. Nobody wanted to stay in villages. We lived in one room in Chernovtsy until other tenants moved out and we got their room, too.

We liked Chernovtsy. It was a nice old town that hadn't been destroyed during the war. People talked Yiddish in the streets. There was a big synagogue, a Jewish school and a Jewish theater in town. Before World War II the majority of the population was Jewish. There was still a significant number of Jewish inhabitants left after the war.

We celebratedobserved Jewish traditions in Chernovtsy. My mother had our special dishes and tableware for Pesach moved to Chernovtsy along with our other belongings. There was a major clean-up of our flat before Pesach. We searched the rooms for breadcrumbs that were burned in the stove. We bought matsahmatzah supplied from Mohilev-Podolsk and Moldavia. My mother cooked all the traditional food on the holiday. Although we didn't have enough food on other days, she always managed to save some money for holidays to buy some chicken and fish. We didn't observe ShabbatSabbath because Saturday was a working day. On Friday evenings my mother lit candles and said a prayer. Then we sat down for dinner. There was no special food for these dinners. My parents went to the synagogue on Jewish holidays - Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Purim. Father conducted sSeder on the eve of Pesach. We fasted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We didn't conduct the kapores ritual because it was a problem to buy chicken. There was another famine in the late 1940s and there were no stocks in stores. Food was sold at the market, but at high prices. My mother had to use her imagination to feed the family.

My father couldn't find a job in Chernovtsy. He went to the vineyard in Yampol near Ivano-Frankovsk. He got a job as a forwarding agent for supplies of wine to stores in Chernovtsy. My brother finished Construction College and entered the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy. There was no anti- Semitism right after the war, but later, in 1948, after the campaign against cosmopolitans [15](#), there were demonstrations of anti-Semitism in Chernovtsy. I was raised an internationalist and didn't make any difference between Jews and Russians. I spoke poor Russian: my mother tongue was Yiddish and I studied in a Ukrainian school. So one of my co-students began to tease me. I don't know whether she did it because I was Jewish or because she didn't like meit, but she pestered me until the end of my studies.

I finished college in 1951 and got a job assignment in Ivano-Frankovsk, a big town in Western Ukraine [300 km from Chernovtsy]. I was eager to study at the mMedical Institute, but in order to do so I needed a certificate of higher secondary education. I had a diploma of the college, but it was a different branch and therefore not valid for the Medical Institute. I went to study in the evening secondary school and kept it a secret that I had a college diploma. If they had found out they wouldn't have allowed me to study there. I worked in a bank at daytime and went to school in the evening. After finishing this school I received a certificate of secondary education. Anti-

Semitism got stronger after the Doctors' Plot in 1953. It was next to impossible for a Jewish girl to enter the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy and I went to Voronezh, Russia, in 1500 km from home. There were no Jews in that area historically and no anti-Semitism, accordingly. I had no problem entering the stomatological institute in Voronezh.

On 5th March 1953 Stalin died. I worked in Ivano-Frankovsk then. I was raised in blind admiration of Stalin, and his death was a tragedy for me. I couldn't help crying. I was surprised that my colleagues were almost happy about it. At that time I went on business to Bendery, a Moldavian town. I heard such terrible things about Stalin there! In general, the people were saying that it had been high time for him to go and that they couldn't wait to get rid of him. Even after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party I couldn't believe that what Khrushchev said about Stalin was true. Discernment came slowly and gradually.

It was next to impossible for a Jewish girl to enter the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy, so I went to Voronezh, Russia, 1,500 kilometers from home. There were no Jews in that area and, consequently, no anti-Semitism. I had no problem entering the Stomatological Institute in Voronezh. In Voronezh I lived in the hostel and shared a room with three other girls. We were industrious students. We read and studied a lot. I spent my vacations with my parents in Chernovtsy. My brother had graduated from the Medical Institute and worked as a cardiologist. I didn't face any anti-Semitism. Upon graduation I got a job assignment at the Stomatological Polyclinic in Chernovtsy where I worked as a dentist until my retirement.

I met my future husband, Efim Orlov, in Chernovtsy. He visited our distant relative from Murafa. They both came to our house. We met when I returned from work. He was a student at the Medical School in Vinnitsa. He came to Chernovtsy on vacation. After he went back to Vinnitsa we started to correspond with each other. A year later he came to Chernovtsy and proposed to me. My husband's real name was Efim Srulevich. Before our wedding he changed his typical Jewish surname to Orlov, a typical Russian surname. He probably thought this would make our life easier and our children would have fewer problems. We got married in 1962 and had a civil ceremony. Then he returned to Vinnitsa to finish his studies. When my husband returned we had a traditional Jewish wedding. We had a chuppah at home, and a rabbi from the synagogue conducted the wedding ceremony. The rabbi said what's traditionally said at weddings. My husband and I exchanged rings and then had a glass of wine given to us. We sipped wine from the glass and the rabbi told me to throw the glass to the ground and break it. We only invited our closest family and friends to our Jewish wedding party.

Efim was born in Dzhurin village, Vinnitsa region in 1931. His father, Shmil Srulevich, was the director of a storehouse before the war, and his mother, Etia Srulevich, was a housewife. Efim had a younger sister called Anna. During World War II their family was in the ghetto in Dzhurin. After the liberation Efim's father was very ill and couldn't work any more. Efim's sister got married and lived in Odessa. She was an accountant at the sugar factory, and her husband was a turner. They had two children. Now my husband's sister and her family live in Israel.

Efim finished school after the war and served in the Soviet army in Germany [East Germany] for two years. After demobilization he worked as a bus driver, and later he entered the Stomatological Faculty of the Medical School in Vinnitsa. Efim's younger sister lived in Odessa after she got married. She was an accountant at the sugar factory and her husband was a turner. They had two

children. Now my husband's sister and her family live in Israel. After he finished Medical School he got an assignment in a village in Chernovtsy region. He worked there for two years before he got a job in Chernovtsy. He was a dentist in a military hospital.

My parents gave me and my husband one room and moved into another room in the same flat with my brother. My husband and I observed Jewish traditions. Of course, it was difficult to follow the kashrut because there was no place to buy kosher products. On Friday evenings the family got together for prayers and the ceremony of lighting candles. We couldn't celebrate Shabbat observe Sabbath because it was a working day, but we got together on all other Jewish holidays.

My daughter Svetlana was born in 1964, and my son Vladimir in 1966. He was circumcised. Our children were raised Jewish. We spoke Russian in the family, but we also taught the children Yiddish. They knew Jewish traditions and celebrated observed Jewish holidays with us. My husband taught our son the traditional four questions [the mah nishtanah] to be asked at seder on Pesach. My husband didn't go to the synagogue at that time because the practice of religiosity was punished by the authorities.

My husband worked a lot to provide for the family. I also worked and took care of the household. We often had guests; my husband and I liked guests. Mostly we had Jewish friends visiting. . My husband and I liked guests. We celebrated both Jewish and Soviet holidays. 9th May, Victory Day, was the best holiday ever! Every year on Victory Day we thanked God for our survival. On other holidays we just got together with friends for a party and to have a good time. We used to have up to 30 guests on every holiday. My husband liked singing Jewish songs on Jewish and Soviet holidays. We invited our Jewish friends on Jewish holidays. I made traditional Jewish food. I've always liked cooking and make delicious food: gefilte fish, chicken broth, chicken neck stuffed with liver and fried onions and strudels. On Purim I make gohameantasheny. On Pesach there's matsahmatzah at home and we follow all rules celebrating this holiday.

My father died in 1969. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery in Chernovtsy. Many people came to my father's funeral. The rabbi, who had conducted our wedding ceremony, was at the funeral. There were speeches about my father, his kindness and his accomplishments. My brother recited the Kaddish for him and repeated that each year. Now my son does it.

Of course we have faced anti-Semitism in life. I'm not trying to say that everybody is anti-Semitic. There are different people, regardless of nationality. Once, when we were in the process of renovating of our apartment, our neighbor ran out of the house and yelled, 'I wish the Germans had exterminated you all!' I guess he was disturbed by the noise in our apartment. We've developed good relationships with his family, but this did happen. Actually, I don't want to talk about it any more.

No one in our family ever wanted to join the Communist Party. We understood that the struggle against religion was a plot of the Party and so was the development of anti-Semitism in the USSR.

In the early 1970s Jews began to move to Israel. My brother Oosher moved there, too. He was a good dentist. He got a job in hospital in Rehovot, Israel. My brother died in 1981. Many of our friends and acquaintances left for Israel and we sincerely wished them a happy life. My husband and I were also thinking about going there, but my mother was ill and the doctors didn't advise her to move to a different place. So we had to stay with her.

After finishing school my daughter wanted to study at the Medical Institute. There was a big competition at Chernovtsy Medical Institute. Besides, they didn't admit Jews. She went to Leningrad but failed at three exams and returned to Chernovtsy. Svetlana went to work at the Electronmach factory. She became fond of electronics. She studied at Chernovtsy University by correspondence and upon graduation continued to work at the factory as an engineer.

My son passed all entrance exams to the Medical Institute, but he wasn't admitted there either. Vladimir finished a trade school and went to serve in the army. After demobilization from the army he worked at a plant for a short time and then entered a dentistry school in Beltsy. He finished it with honors and became a dental technician. He had also finished a music school when he was in secondary school. He learned to play the violin. He entered the Music Academy in Kamenets-Podolsk and finished it with honors. When he returned to Chernovtsy, Vladimir began to work with the Jewish Cultural Association, which was opened in the late 1980s.

Perestroika brought many positive changes into our life. We got the opportunity to travel and visit our friends and relatives abroad without fear of having problems with the authorities. My husband and I visited his sister in Israel in 1990. The country left a great impression on us. It was hard to believe that those blooming gardens grew in a stone desert. We liked the friendly and hospitable people. We traveled to many towns and historical places. It's a pity that this small country constantly has to be on guard. I pray for peace in Israel. I liked the young people in Israel. They are self-confident and love their country. My husband dearly wanted to move to Israel but we couldn't because he was ill.

Jewish life is coming back and people turn back to observing old traditions. Jewish organization - Hesed, in particular - play an important role in the life of our family. We receive food packages and it's a great support considering our miserable pensions. Every week I attend a club for older people in Hesed. I have made new friends there. Perestroika also had drawbacks. Many people lost their jobs due to the closing down of many enterprises. The Electronmach factory, where my daughter worked, was closed. Svetlana went to work with the Jewish Cultural Society and from there she got an assignment to a Sunday school operated by the Jewish school that was recently opened. Svetlana went to a seminar in Israel. When she was in Jerusalem I saw in the news on TV that terrorists blasted a bus with tourists. I could hardly wait for her call to hear that she was fine. After this stress I've felt constantly ill.

My daughter met her husband, Maxim Sofovich, at a party in the Jewish club for young people in 1995. At the beginning it was called Jewish Club of Young People, later it changed its name, but I don't remember what it's called now. Young people studied Jewish traditions, history and language there. They also studied foreign languages and computer training. There were literature, music and dancing classes. Young people could also go in for sports. Maxim and Svetlana went to the synagogue, concerts of Jewish music and Jewish club together. Maxim studied at Chernovtsy University and did some work for the Jewish community. He was an Orthodox Jew and observed all Jewish traditions. Maxim was much younger than Svetlana and I was concerned about it. But he was insistent and proposed to Svetlana several times until she gave her consent.

? They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at the synagogue and a wedding party in a restaurant. There were many guests at their wedding. I helped and supported them as much as I could. Svetlana's daughter was born in 1996. They named her Milana after my father Mendel. My

granddaughter also has the Jewish name of Nehama after my mother. After my granddaughter was born, they moved to Maxim's mother that who had better living conditions. Svetlana was often ill after her daughter was born, and this had an impact on her marriage. Maxim was reproaching her. He told her that she did everything wrong and that she wasn't religious. He didn't help her but spent all his free time praying at home and in the synagogue instead. Svetlana was feeling ill and the baby required care. Maxim reproached her for not having more children like other Jewish patriarchal families. He went to study in Kiev and then moved to the US with a new wife. We've never had divorces in our family before. We told my granddaughter that her father is in Kiev. We didn't tell Milana that he went to the US. My daughter and her child moved back to live with me. My son spends a lot of his time with Milana, but he cannot replace her father. We've never had divorces in our family before. I think that a child must have a father. My son wants to marry a Jewish girl, but there isn't much choice in Chernovtsy because many young people are leaving. I look forward to having more grandchildren.

My husband died in 1993. He wanted to move to Israel so much, but we couldn't do it since he was ill. We buried him in the Jewish section of the town cemetery in Chernovtsy. The rabbi conducted the funeral. Many people came to my husband's funeral. In the same year my mother died after being ill for a long time. We buried her beside my father. The death of my husband and mother was a terrible loss for me. I cannot get used to the thought that they are no more. My son recites the Kaddish for them each year.

Jewish life slowly returns and people start to observe old traditions again. The Jewish organization Hesed plays an important role in the life of our family. Hesed in Chernovtsy was formed in 1996, and since then we've always been supported by Hesed. We receive food packages, which is a great support considering our miserable pensions. Every week I attend a club for older people at Hesed. I have made new friends there. We attend interesting lectures, literature circles and watch movies. There is a good library with books by classical and modern Jewish writers. There are concerts of Jewish music. For many old people Hesed has become a place where they can communicate and rest.

It's difficult to say what the future will bring. I would like to emigrate, but I cannot go to Israel due to my health condition. The climate there is too harsh for me. Besides, I would only move with my children if they decided to live in another country. I can't live without them, and I believe they need me, too.

Glossary

1 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

2 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

3 Keep in touch with relatives abroad

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death. The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his relatives abroad and charge him with espionage, send to concentration camp or even sentence to death.

34 Guild II

In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

5 Bessarabia

Historical area between the Prut and Dneestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia. Merchants were rich and respectable people. They were merchants of I, II, & III Guild. The only difference was that merchants of Guild I were allowed to make deals with foreign merchants. The rest of them were allowed to do their business in Russia. [46](#) Transnistria: Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food. Transnistria -

area between the rivers of Dnestr and Bug and the Black Sea, established at the beginning of WWII. It was ruled by the Rumania name of the Dnestr river - Nistru. [7](#) Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz): In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

[8](#) Pogroms in Ukraine

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

[9](#) Collectivization

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

[10](#) Famine in Ukraine

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

[11](#) Struggle against religion

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

[12](#) 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.

[13](#) Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the

political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

14 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

15 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The antisemitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

16 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.

17 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. COLLECTIVIZATION of agriculture in the USSR had to do with mass establishment of collective farms in the late 1920s - early 1930s that meant liquidation of private farms. It was a forceful process. Many peasants were repressed. It resulted in significant reduction of farmers and agricultural production and famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine, Northern Caucasus, Volga and other regions.

18 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee. In those years it was not safe to go to the synagogue. Those were the horrific 1930s - the period of struggle against religion. There was only one synagogue left of the 300 existing in Kiev before the revolution of 1917. Cult structures were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind the KGB (State Security Committee) walls.