

# Basya Chaika

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Kiev

Ukraine

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## My family background

My name is Basya. I was born in 1926 in Kiev. I was named after my grandmother - Basya Gorenstein, who died before the Revolution, that is, before 1917. I did not know my grandfather, Moshe-Leib Gorenstein either, because he died before I was born, but at home we had a big portrait of him that was made in Paris at the beginning of the century. In the portrait, my grandfather is a handsome and respectable man with a beautiful full beard and is wearing a yarmulke. He worked in commerce; he had his own bank in Kiev, according to his daughter - my mother, and they had a big expensive house. My grandfather was actively involved in charity - he sponsored Kiev's scientists and engineers. According to my mother, their home was Jewish, and they celebrated every holiday, Sabbath, and my grandfather attended synagogue every week. My mother said that on holidays, poor people came over to receive gifts from my grandfather and to be seated around his table. There were many poor people in those days who had lost their jobs and even their families, and the government of course would not help them.

Grandfather Moshe and grandmother Basya had six children. All the children finished secondary school and had secular educations. I remember almost all of his children, my aunts and uncles: the first one was Isaac, who was born in 1879 in Kiev and was killed in 1941 during the Holocaust in Babi Yar together with his wife, Hannah, and daughter. My cousin, the daughter of Isaac and Hannah, Manya, was handicapped, and she was pushed to Babi Yar in her wheelchair. The second daughter of grandfather Moshe and grandmother Basya, daughter Hannah (Khaika), born in 1883, was also killed in Babi Yar on September 29, 1941, together with her husband. Thus, out of the six children of grandfather Moshe Gorenstein, two were killed in the Holocaust. Together with their family members five were killed in total.

Then grandfather Moshe had four daughters - Malka, Rachel (my mother), Yelizaveta, and Lena, who survived the Holocaust in evacuation. All of them have passed away, and some of their family members perished during World War II (11 people), while others left Kiev for other places in the world. I know now only two of them: Alexander Pritsker - the son of aunt Hannah and Mendel Pritsker, and Marat Golik - the son of Liza Pritsker and Izya Golik. (by the way, Izya Golik was a

cousin of his wife Liza. The Jewish tradition does not encourage such marriages, and in my childhood I heard a lot of bad things about it from adults.)

### Childhood memories

I remember all these relatives from my pre-war childhood in Kiev very well. They lived poorly, two families in one little house on Turgenevska Street. After the Revolution, all of my grandfather Moshe's possessions were confiscated, and prior to the Second World War they remained very poor. I often went to see them there. They lived under very crowded conditions, but they were always so warm and welcoming. As I said, all of their children received higher educations, but in the Soviet times, they had practically nothing left of their wealth or their Jewish lifestyle. They lost them both.

I don't remember any Jewish holidays there and at home they spoke Russian. The oldest generation spoke Yiddish only when they did not want their children to understand them and their children were never taught it.

The first time I saw tallit and tefillin was with my father's father. His name was Aaron Pan. He came from the town of Kazatin, Kiev region. The family of grandfather Aaron was very poor, I never knew what he did, but his lifestyle was strongly Orthodox Jewish. He and his wife - my grandmother Hannah - kept their traditions until they died.

Aaron and Hannah had three sons: the oldest - my father Ber (later - Boris), Yakov and Nyuma. They also had daughter Genya, who died in 1917 in childbirth. Grandmother Hannah and grandfather Aaron brought up the son she bore - Zyunya Kuperman. Later, he became an aircraft designer. Prior to the war he worked as a chief engineer at the Makeyevka Chemical Plant. During the war and after the war, he worked at secret defense plants, taking part in the creation of the hydrogen bomb. Both during and after the war, we were forbidden to keep up a correspondence with him.

All three brothers received a good education: I think, they went to a cheder in Kazatin, and then - a secular school in Kiev. Uncle Yakov was a Communist, a military man who held a very high position; he was also a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. He died in 1937 in Moscow from a stroke while speaking at a meeting to his electors. (A few months before his death, his cousin, whose name I unfortunately don't know, was arrested and shot the same night in Kiev). Uncle Yakov escaped his destiny - he died his own death. A street in Vinnitsa was named after him. I remember him very well: always a nice looking military uniform, a black car that took him everywhere, he and his wife Sarah had a luxurious flat in Kiev in Pechersk - a white bear skin on the floor of his huge study. He very seldom visited us, but I received birthday presents from him every year - large boxes of candies that we never saw in our life. Grandmother Hannah had a very hard time after the death of her son. He was her biggest pride in her life. Grandfather Aaron did not live to see his death; he died in 1936.

I also remember my uncle Nyuma. He, his wife and daughter Inna lived in the Pushkinska Street in Kiev before the war. After grandfather Aaron's death, grandmother Hannah lived with them. In 1941 Uncle Nyuma sent our whole family to evacuation and went to fight the Germans on the front. He died in 1942. His family kept kashrut, Sabbath, and all the holidays, which was an exception

among the urban Jews of those times. The urban Jews of those days preferred to live just like everybody else. They usually were strongly assimilated. Many Jews, just like many other people around them, preferred to believe in the revolution, hoping that it would bring them more peaceful and better life. Urban Jews usually did not keep their Jewish traditions for only one reason: after the generation of their parents passed, they no longer believed in God and did not think there was any sense in keeping those old traditions of their parents. Not everyone thought that way, of course, but it was the majority, or it seems to me it was.

They spoke Yiddish in the family. Grandmother Hannah did not particularly like my mother and me for abandoning the tradition; she called us "goyim" [or "gentiles"]. She was especially irritated when I, being a young pioneer, argued with her that there was no God at all, neither Russian, nor Jewish. Grandmother Hannah died in 1942 in evacuation, in my mother's and my own arms. Before her death she said that I was her best granddaughter.

My father Ber, being the eldest son of Aaron and Hanna, had the hardest time making his way into the world. His constant duties to take care of the younger ones took a lot of his time. In order to pay for getting higher education, he tutored a lot of children in Jewish families of Kiev. He knew Hebrew well. The Revolution of 1917 changed little in his life, but made possible his marriage with Rachel Gorenstein, my mother, 1918, who was very rich before the Revolution. They made a very good couple. In love and peace they lived together till December 31, 1942, the day when my father died of a stroke. On the New Year night in the Urals, near the town of Krasnoufimsk, he went to get some wood, so that at least on New Year night my mother and I could be warm. He was brought home dead next morning.

Prior to the war, my father was the chief of the financial department of the Higher Police School in Kiev. My brother Yosif (7 years older than me, born in 1919) and I seldom saw our father- according to the then Soviet schedule he often worked even at night. He was quiet, calm, not very talkative, but very kind and agreeable). As far as I remember, he had no particular political preferences. It is funny that while holding such a high rank in the structure of the Interior Ministry, he was not a Communist. Neither was he an Orthodox Jew like grandfather Aaron, at least I never noticed that. He was simply a very good and hardworking man. My brother Yosif has fully inherited his character.

My mother, Rachel Gorenstein was the energy center of our family. She was born in 1897 in Kiev. She was the fourth and the most beautiful child of Moshe and Basya Gorenstein. As a baby she was taken around in a richly decorated stroller, and everyone said she was as beautiful as a rose. Rose became her second, and then main name. After the war and till her death in 1954 she was officially (in documents) registered as Rozalia Moiseyevna. The first twenty years of life, my mother lived as the daughter of a big Kiev banker; she finished a very prestigious and very expensive secondary school with honors; she knew foreign languages and wanted to continue her education. She dreamed of becoming a doctor. Moshe Gorenstein, however, explained to her that a good Jewish girl, even a very rich one, must be a good wife and mother, for which her education was already good enough. My mother felt offended by him for the rest of her life. After getting married she never worked outside the house.

Grandfather Moshe did not live to see his daughter Rachel-Rose as a wife or as a mother. In 1918 he had already passed away, and my mother had no proper Jewish wedding. (Kiev of 1918, with its pogroms and various anti- Semitic gangs was not a good place for Jewish weddings). My mother

immediately switched to another life (we presume the interviewee meant that she dropped all contact to Judaism), and it was dangerous to remember or tell about that previous life during the Soviet times. My mother only shared stories with me about herself and her father who was a banker after the war, and she begged me to keep my mouth shut.

## Growing up

I was born when my mother was 29. My brother Yosif was 7, he just started going to school. In 1926, we lived in downtown Kiev, at 49 Krasnoarmeyskaya Street in a big five-storey building. Seven unrelated families lived in a single apartment.. Every family had its own room, and everyone shared the kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Every family consisted of at least 4-5 people. In our small room four of us lived. Later we made two small rooms of this one room. Our neighbors were Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish.

We were friends. It was the year 1933 - the year of famine. My mother, who used to help everyone in her childhood, shared our only food portion among all the children in our flat. My mother was a wonderful cook - the whole house asked her for recipes of Jewish cuisine. Jewish cuisine was that little detail of the Jewish tradition that I learned from my mother prior to the war. She taught me everything except kashrut because she never kept it. Sometimes grandfather Aaron came to visit us (grandmother Hannah almost never came to our non-kosher home, and when she did come, she never ate anything). For my grandparents, my mother had special kosher food and dishes. We also had a talet and a tefilin for my grandfather. When my grandfather would leave, my mother would put these things away deep into the wardrobe, so that nobody else would see them. My father also brought real matzo for us on Passover from my grandfather, and it was a big secret. We could not share it with our neighbors, because it was against the law, but my mother's recipe of noodles was used by our whole international house.

In autumn of 1934 I went to school. I was 8 years old. From my preschool childhood I still have two vivid memories: the first one is related to the famine of 1933, when in front of my own eyes a homeless child stole the bread that my mother had just received on her bread-card. My mother began to cry, and I felt very scared. My second memory is about our big yard, where we were friends with children of at least five or six nationalities. One child was once called a kike so his parents filed a lawsuit against the offender. Court hearings were held, but I don't remember the result.

My first contacts outside my family before school were made in my yard. I was the leader in all games (mostly active ones). My friends were usually boys. I never liked playing with dolls, but since the age of 7 I liked embroidering and sewing very much. My Ukrainian neighbor taught me these skills, and she praised my abilities very much. She believed sewing was something I could always use in life, and she was right.

My first school, where I studied from the first through the third grade was school nr 15. It stood in place of today's Vatutin cinema. Then I went to a newly built school nr 131. (Schools in the Soviet Union almost never had any special names, only numbers. Sometimes they had both a name and a number, but a number was a must.) That school was Russian, and my parents could send me only there. I knew nothing about Jewish schools then, and Jews did not send their children to the few Ukrainian schools that existed at the time.

We had forty children in our class, all of different nationalities. There were many children with purely Jewish names that had not been changed yet. Among teachers there were many Jews, too, but students paid no attention to this fact: their political and human characteristics were much more important. At school, in the yard, at our shared apartment the language we spoke was Russian. We celebrated common holidays, with the exception of the first New Year, introduced in Kiev by Postyshev after it was forbidden during the Revolution.

At the age of 10 I joined young pioneers, just like everybody else. By that time I had become a strong atheist and internationalist. And just like everyone else, we children, began to look for spies. In 1937, a family was arrested in our house: a couple that was reported as Trotsky-followers. People said that the wife carried enciphered messages from Trotsky in her braid. After their arrest, a big truck came to take out their books. A year later our English teacher was arrested. Our class did not believe he was the "enemy of people", and we raised a real rebellion at school. In about six months he was rehabilitated and sent back to school, which was a rare case in those times. Almost the whole school went to visit him in hospital where he found himself after the prison.

Besides English, I also liked sports, track and field athletics, as well as gymnastics, but my mother believed that a Jewish girl from a good family should not go for sports, and she only allowed me to take dancing lessons. We also often went to the children's Jewish theater, which was not far from our school. There were plays in Yiddish, which were translated into Russian by an actor on the stage. I remember a play about a Jewish girl who fell in love with a Ukrainian guy, and their parents were against their marriage first, but then they saw how this couple was happy, and allowed their marriage. There were no arranged marriages among my relatives then, but right prior to the war such marriages became acceptable in Kiev.

In 1938 we met Spanish children in Kiev. I wanted to invite a Spanish child into our family very much, but my parents found it impossible. We wore Spanish caps and sang Spanish songs. We hated the fascists and prepared for the war, although everyone said there would be no war. In 1939, discussions about fascism became more serious, especially after Germany attacked Poland. At our house we had regular public lectures on the international situation, and children attended these lectures as well - everyone was interested in politics back then. We had special "political information hours" at school and at our amateur theater. We spoke a lot about the fascists, but never about their special attitude towards the Jews.

### **During the war**

We were looking forward to June 22, because on that day our new central stadium was to be opened, and it was very close to us. But instead of this joyful news, we heard rumors that there were bombings somewhere in the city. We did not see the bombs yet, but went outside anyway. I think I remember seeing refugees from Western Ukraine in our Krasnoarmeyskaya Street on that day. I don't know how it could be, but they said that the Germans were shooting everyone in their lands. It is still a mystery how they could have reached Kiev by June 22. In the afternoon on that day we heard the first radio announcement that the war began. There were loud speakers on poles in the street, large black plates. People were crying and were getting ready to fight. Everyone expected Stalin to address the nation, but he did not. Instead, we listened to Molotov. Starting on June 23, the whole population of our building and other buildings were digging trenches. We had shifts of people who would stand on duty on the roofs to neutralize firebombs in time. Every house

had air-raid shelters. When the bombing raids began - and in our street they began on the third day of the war - my mother and I did not go to those shelters, because my mother was afraid that she would be buried under the ground. I was not even 15 years old then. By the beginning of the war there were three of us living in Kiev: my father, my mother and me. My brother Yosif was studying at the naval college in Leningrad at the time.

This is how I remember the first bombing of my life. At night, the Germans flew and spread their missiles, so that it was light as day. Bombs did not fall often on our quarter; defense dirigibles "hung" over the city all day long, and anti-aircraft guns were on every roof to shoot down the enemy. Nevertheless, in front of my own eyes, a bomb fell on the building next to ours - and destroyed it.

Later, bombing raids became awful, but during the first month there was no panic: people knew exactly what, where and when they must do. The only destructive component was the refugees. Every day their number grew, they were coming from the west, telling terrible things about the Germans. The city began to get ready for evacuation.

Evacuation was voluntary. People left with their organizations and establishments, not according to their residence or schools. People got registered at their workplaces, and companies evacuated their workers from Kiev. The first people who were evacuated - at the end of June - could take anything they wanted, even furniture. People were given a lot of place on the trains, but they did not take much, because everyone was sure that victory would come soon and evacuation would not be long. People expected to be home in one or two months. My father believed so, too. He was not going to be evacuated. He was liable for a call-up, and he expected it. They decided to evacuate my mother, my aunt (the wife of my father's brother) and me. My mother begged her brother Isaac and her sister Hannah to evacuate. They refused very firmly. They believed that the Germans they saw in Kiev in 1918 were a highly cultured nation, and nobody can expect any terrible things from them. Officially, nobody told us that the Jews had to be evacuated first of all. There were rumors to this effect, circulated by the refugees, but in our big family nobody really believed them. Only our family and two younger sisters of my mother's grandfather Gorenstein went to evacuation. When on July 7 we stood at the train station, waiting for our train having said good-bye to my father, he came back to us. He was released from the army for health reasons - he had heart problems. We were all put on the train. We had only one suitcase with us. Our railcar looked as follows: it was a big freight car, in the middle of which were two metal heating stoves and along which were several two- and three-storey plank beds, on which people and their belongings lied. Around 80 people could fit into such a car.

Right there, on the train station, there was another bombing. Everyone ran out of the train into the shelter, while my mother and I stood under the roof of the Kiev train station during the whole bombing raid, and then went back to our train. When we were crossing the Dneper, leaving Kiev, the bombing began again. We were crossing the bridge under bombs. Our train managed to escape, but the one after ours was destroyed and sank in the Dneper. We were taken to the Urals. It took us a month to get there by this train. We had to spend a lot of time at some stations. We would meet people from other trains, and then at the next station we would see that train burned out and people were dead. Our train was also often bombed. When it happened, the train would stop and all its passengers would scatter in the fields, while the German planes would fly very low



and shoot people almost point-blank. This continued till Voronezh. After Voronezh the bombings gradually ceased, and the journey to Krasnoufimsk, in the Urals, was practically quiet. We did not have enough food on the train. Only small food portions were given out in a centralized manner, the rest we had to buy at the stations. Local residents offered us their products, and we had money to buy them, but even such small markets were often bombed.

Krasnoufimsk was a small town not far from Sverdlovsk, in the Urals. We arrived there on August 5, 1941 - my parents, Aunt Liza (my mother's sister), her husband, uncle Yakov, and me. Uncle Yakov worked at the railways, and due to his railway department we were evacuated. My aunt and uncle were settled in a room at the train station, and my uncle began to work at the railway depot. My parents and I were settled at the house of former White Guard soldier Orlov. We were put there by force, and he was forced to let us stay in his large summer kitchen, where we spent two years. The kitchen was big, but very cold, and in winters, when frosts reached minus 40 degrees Centigrade, the walls of the kitchen were covered with ice. Our landlord looked forward to the Germans' coming to the Urals. When he heard on the radio about cities captured by the Germans, he without any fear put icons around the house and played victory marches. Psychologically, it was very hard for us, Soviet people, to live with him.

I went to school; my mother did not work, only my father worked, so we had his salary and the money sent by brother Yosif, who fought at the front. We also had food cards, which gradually replaced money in 1941. Food was poor and usually frozen.

At the same time, there was absolute order in the city. There were no bandits, no hooligans in the streets. Food provision was poor but regular and well ordered. Special Communist Party and Soviet bodies were in control of it.

Right there in taiga, outside the city, plants that came from the Big Land were established, and a month later they began to put out planes, tanks and other military equipment. We turned out to be absolutely unprepared for winter: we had no clothes, and the Urals climate was very different from ours; it was extremely hard for many people. Some people lost a lot of weight, while others, including me, began to gain weight and looked as healthy as ever. Being almost always hungry I was rather fat, with pink cheeks, and nobody believed I was starving. I went to study at the 8th grade. Our class was big; there were mainly children from Moscow. I joined the Komsomol League there, and in the 9th grade I became the Secretary of the Komsomol School Organization. We did not only study - several months a year we spent on collective farms in the fields. We worked under awful conditions - without clothes and almost with no equipment. While studying, we also went to hospitals, read letters to the wounded, took care of them and provided political information to every stratum of population of Krasnoufimsk.

We had a radio at home, which was on day and night. It was very difficult for us to hear about the surrender of our cities; we cried hard when our dear Kiev was surrendered. Nothing special was said about Babi Yar or other places of mass shootings of the Jews. The usual formula during those times was: death of Soviet civilians. It was only in 1942 that we heard about the Jewish tragedy in Kiev. But we did hear it in an official radio program. We worried very much for our families. The attitude towards the Jews in Krasnoufimsk was fine. There were not many Jews there. I never heard the word "kike" from the local population. The only exceptions were former White Guard soldiers, many of whom were in Krasnoufimsk in exile. Their attitude towards the Jews was openly hostile.

At that time, we did not discuss the special attitude of the Germans towards the Jews. I don't remember ever asking this question. We were much more anxious about the situation at the front and famine, which was very strong since winter 1942.

We had almost nothing except bread, while its norm for students and non-working family members was 400 grams a day. At school, however, we were given a little bit more, but it was absolutely not enough. Every day I went to bed hungry.

We continued to keep the traditional Soviet lifestyle. We also tried to celebrate all the Soviet holidays and even New Year. For young girls, the military were the most handsome men and heroes. In spring 1942 I saw captured Germans for the first time in Krasnoufimsk.

Since March 1942, transport trucks with the captured Germans passed by Krasnoufimsk to go further into Siberia. The transport trucks were heavily guarded. There were three lines of guards around them. The Germans were guarded against the evacuated population, the Soviet people, who were ready to tear them apart, for many had already received letters about the death of their near and dear at the front. I remember the Germans were miserable, poorly clothed, half-frozen. Once a transport truck passed by us, and there was no one alive - all the Germans got frozen on the way and turned into ice.

We all were patriots of our country. Every schoolboy dreamed of fighting at the front. When I was at the 9th grade I went to the military registration and enlistment office, begging them to send girls to the front line. They certainly refused. In 1942, I was not even 16 years old yet.

The first loss we experienced in our family was my grandmother. She died in front of my mother and me in winter 1942. And on December 31, 1942, my father died. He had gone outside to chop wood so we wouldn't be cold. They brought his body in the next morning.

In order to make a hole in the frozen soil with temperature below 40 degrees and bury him we had to work three days with picks. So, my mother and I remained alone. My brother fought at the front. We knew practically nothing about his fate. Apart from bread, in winter 1942 we also had two sacks of frozen potatoes. Fresh potatoes were in our dreams until the end of evacuation. We did not starve to death only because my mother sold my father's only suit. It was very good, and we exchanged it for two sacks of flour. It lasted us till the end of summer 1943.

In June 1943 evacuation ended, and we were taken back to the territories released by the Soviet army. Now, in August 1943, we were coming home, and our way back was very much like our way to evacuation. We were in practically the same freight cars. Our journey to Voronezh was quiet, while after Voronezh bombings began again, and we again saw transports ruined on their way home, people killed ...

A little later a railway station in the Ukrainian town of Konotop was fully destroyed in front of us. Two weeks before that Konotop was liberated from the Germans. The front line was on the railway juncture Vorozhba. Kiev was still in the hands of the Germans. We could not go further. We were left in Konotop. Bodies of Soviet power were formed from our midst, the young people, Komsomol members, who were in evacuation, that is, who did not stay in the occupied territories. Local residents, who had stayed in the territories occupied by the Germans were not trusted with such work. Thus I began to work at the passport department of the Konotop police, and in two months,



due to some circumstances, I became the chief of this department. I had just turned 16 at the time.

Our work at the passport department consisted of checking and re- registering residents of Konotop, putting Soviet stamps into their old, pre- war, and most often German passports. In their old pre-war Soviet passports people had big, two-page stamps - the German swastika, and we put our own Soviet stamps next to it into the passports of people we have checked.

People stood in long, several kilometers long lines to get to our department. We worked 12-14 hours a day. The flow of people did not decrease for several months. The reason was that without the Soviet mark in their passports, Konotop residents could neither find a job, nor get bread cards. Their passports were considered invalid. If I remember correctly, there were practically no Jewish names among Konotop residents I checked and registered.

Registration and checking of documents was a hard, responsible and sometimes dangerous task. Many people turned out to be without documents at all; many were hiding from the Soviet authorities or concealed their names, for different reasons, pretending to be somebody else. There were many deserters from the army and very many bandits. We had to filter out all of them, find them out and pass them on. Regularly, once or twice a week, we took part in special raids to check documents around the town.

At this work I grew very serious and suspicious. Two months later I was taken to be a court assessor in the military tribunal. The tribunal consisted of three people, it was a secret court: two assessors (I was one of them) and the chairman, sometimes a military lawyer, sometimes not. We judged all kinds of traitors: German policemen and other people who collaborated with the Germans. Information about them reached us through numerous sources, including the local population.

Two weeks before our coming to Konotop, the local population hung the man, a Ukrainian, who was chief of the police under the Germans; they hung him without any court judgment. Later we had all the necessary proceedings. We did not know the term "collaboration" then, but everyone knew the term "traitor of motherland."

A military tribunal was a secret, closed court hearing, but the procedure, as you can imagine, was kept very strict. There were many witnesses. Court hearings could last from two to ten or more days. We convicted a Ukrainian doctor, who was chief of the medical service of the concentration camp for prisoners of war in Konotop under the Germans and who gradually killed all the Soviet prisoners of war and betrayed those doctors who tried to save them. I don't remember ever convicting anyone for shooting the Jews in Konotop, although I'm sure there were such shootings. But we did not register such places or people who took part in them at that time. We convicted those locals who betrayed their fellow men, sending them to death.

I, as an assessor, had to sign death sentences more than once. Such a responsibility really changes a girl's character at 16. I was very radical and uncompromising. Local residents treated me with caution. When my friend and I turned up to the dance club, people fled from that place, often thinking we were on another raid. Several times people tried to kill me. My poor mother cried a lot because of me. But in the eyes of the local youth we were heroes, who accomplished justice.

I worked there till the beginning of 1944. In January, Uncle Yakov came to pick us up from Kiev. He took my aunt, but I could not leave because, as it turned out, after working for four months in the police, I became subject to call-up, that is, the military, and I could no longer move around without permission of the military command. We learned that our house in Kiev was ruined, so we had nowhere to stay anyway. My mother and I stayed in Konotop. At the same time Uncle Yakov told us about the death of the Gorenstein family in Babi Yar.

For another whole year, until 1944, when I was 17, I was the chief of the passport department and in charge of the passport regime in Konotop and its region. Without my personal signature on passes and stamps, no one could leave Konotop, no one could come and stay to live in it for more than three days. Some people tried to bribe me, promising big money and services, while I wore shoes with torn bottoms for that whole year.

In the beginning of 1945, after a very strict checking of the Konotop passport department by the regional Sumy department, I was sent there as the chief of the passport department of the region. It was an extraordinary career for a Jewish girl, unbelievable. In the center of the city I was given a 20-meter room with two beds - for me and for my mother, one chair and a huge suitcase, which served as a table. It was an unheard-of luxury in 1945.

There was more work in the region than in Konotop district, but two months later I was again promoted to the special unit of the Department of the Interior. My unit monitored all secret information about Sumy citizens. This information, first of all, related to people whose names were found in the German archive that was captured there, that is, people, who collaborated with the Germans during the occupation. We mainly checked and traced such people. As far as I remember, I never saw any case related specifically to the Jewish mass murders in Sumy, even though there were obviously mass Jewish burial places in Sumy. Besides, we received a large group of people, who returned from the German captivity or slave labor, followed by the German information archive, transferred to us. So, I had to deal with this work as well. It was at that work that I received my first officer rank - junior lieutenant.

## Returning to Kiev

At the end of April 1945 I came to Kiev by miracle. One Russian colonel in Sumy learned that I came from Kiev but did not have a chance to go there after evacuation, so he let me go there for a month. Considering that nobody got any vacation then, I can only marvel at the fact. It is impossible to describe what I saw in my native city, how I saw my house, which resembled a skeleton on the burnt out street. I hardly escaped death there, when I was running up the half-ruined stairs to the second floor, to our apartment, where in the hole in the wall I saw the remains of our pictures. In the yard, where my whole childhood passed, I met my former neighbors; our meeting was very warm, but I felt like I came from a different world: they were free people, while I, at 17-years-old, was a very responsible and secret worker. It was hard for me to find my relatives. I stayed at Uncle Yakov's and aunt Liza's and spent the month there. First I hoped very much that I would remain in Kiev and be transferred here for work. My hopes ran high because in Sumy I was working together with the niece of Polina Zhemchuzhnaya, Molotov's wife. She gave me a letter of recommendation to a big boss in Kiev, and after seeing him, I almost got registered at work in Kiev. The only difficulty was the fact that even being able to give me work at the department of the Interior, this man was unable to help me find a flat. At that time, it was practically impossible for

my mother and I - my brother was still at the Northern Navy - to rent an apartment and pay for it. Besides, after staying a short time, the situation in Kiev began to weigh heavily on me. Almost a third of the Gorenstein family had died. Nobody saw their graves - it was the whole Babi Yar. I learned that after our evacuation our neighbors took all of our belongings. I was told I could turn to the court, but I just couldn't do that. My best pre-war friend Lena turned out to be a complete stranger to me. It was very hard for me to live in Kiev, and when I still had about five days of my vacation left, right after the Victory Day, I went back to Sumy.

The thought about Babi Yar, where my relatives lay, which was so close to Kiev, was unbearable for me. I remember that April 1945 well. People went around Jewish homes in Kiev, collecting money for a monument. As far as I know, no monument was built there within the next 20 or even 30 years.

The only good memory I had from Kiev then was the Victory Day. I celebrated it with my friends from my Krasnoarmeyskaya Street in Kiev. Since May 7, people gathered around loudspeakers outside, waiting for the announcement of victory. And we heard this announcement at 12:00 on May 9, 1945. "Hurrah!" could be heard all over the city; people shot into the air from guns and rifles. It was a celebration for every one personally and for the whole nation at large.

I remember that immediately after the Victory Day, people began to tell the Jews to emigrate to Palestine. As far as I remember, most people did not want to go. My family, and me first of all, were very negative about emigration, we wanted to stay and build up our country. Those who emigrated were traitors in my opinion.

In comparison with pre-war times, the attitude towards the Jews was considerably worse. It was a painful paradox. It would seem that after all the atrocities that the fascists did to the Jews in front of the whole of Kiev, they were to be at least pitied. But nothing of this sort was happening. A precedent was created - the Germans demonstrated that the Jews could be destroyed, and the daringness of this crime inspired fresh anti-Semitism, which in fact had never been absent in Ukraine. Nevertheless, it did not push my family towards emigration. We were Soviet patriots and could not imagine ourselves outside our motherland. But our internationalism, especially that of my mother, was greatly shaken at that time. At the end of 1944, unexpectedly for the whole family, my older brother Yosif married a Russian woman. He spent the war serving as an officer at the Northern Navy. He had been on a trawler and led military transportation vessels across mine fields. He married a woman from his ship crew. The family did not take the fact that she was older than him as painfully as the fact that she was Russian. Unlike the pre-war times that I have already described, this fact was taken very negatively. My mother said then that if it were before the war, she would not mind a mixed marriage with a Gentile, but the war tragedy, which we did not call Holocaust yet, left an impact on her understanding, and she was afraid of mixed marriages.

Anyway, my brother's marriage was to be recognized. And it was not the last trial for my mother, because soon afterwards I met my future husband, an officer, a captian of the Soviet Army, Alexey Chaika, and in 1946, despite vigorous protests of my mother and our whole Jewish family, we got married.

I should say that Alexey Chaika was not the first one who made a proposal to me. There were a lot of boys, mainly Russian ones, around me. There were Jewish boys as well, introduced to me by my

Jewish relatives. But at one point I told them not to interfere with my life because I was going to find my spouse on my own. That's how it happened. I would date others for a long time, but it took Alexey Chaika only one month to make a proposal and to get my "yes." However, it was a "yes" from me, and not from my mother. She did not mind the fact that my future husband was 12 years older than me, but she greatly minded his military profession and nationality. Just like in the case with my brother Yosif, she reminded me, too, about how Russian husbands betrayed their Jewish wives and children during the occupation. It got stuck in her memory for her whole life. In addition, she was absolutely sure that some time later he would say something bad about my nationality. Just let me tell you at once: she was wrong. My husband and I lived together for 45 years, and our marriage was unbelievably happy.

## Married life

Our wedding took place on April 25, 1946. The wedding was a military one; my husband's whole regiment and my colleagues came to see us. There were no relatives, except my mother, at the wedding. My uncle and aunt, members of our Kiev family, officially rejected me. But my husband was right in saying before our wedding that if our life together went well, all the relatives will recognize us again, but if our life went badly, nobody will need me anyhow. Since our life was good, we quickly reconciled with the whole Kiev family. Alexey, with his open and kind heart, quickly won the love of my relatives, and first and best of all, my mother's.

Since the end of 1946, my husband and I began to travel all over Ukraine. My husband served at the air regiment, and together with this regiment we moved from place to place. We never stayed at one place for more than six months. In snowy frosty December of 1947, in the town of Belaya Tserkov, not far from Kiev, our daughter Tatyana was born.

In the morning of that day, I had to unload a whole truck of coal - the winter was cold and a truck of coal was an unheard-of luxury in the then Belaya Tserkov. My husband brought the truck in the morning, but we could unload it only in the evening. I did not want to wait till the evening, I was afraid that somebody would steal it. So, I decided to unload it on my own, and that is why my daughter was born one full month early. She was born at night; there was no electricity for some reason, and candles were lit around me.

I had to quit work. Our frequent moving from place to place did not let me work properly, and then my newborn daughter required my full attention. The problem was that right before her birth I slipped on the steps and fell with a bucket of coal, and so when my daughter was one year old she already had fully developed traumatic cataract. She had two surgeries, on both eyes, in Kiev, but still her sight remained very weak for the whole life.

In 1955 our traveling came to an end: our daughter had to go to school, and since she could study only at a special school for children with impaired vision, and this school was only one - in Kiev, my husband had to transfer to the reserve, having declined a higher army promotion.

Thus, since 1955, I have been living in Kiev again. When I look back at my life in various military camps, I always remember cold and almost hungry existence, crowded houses with cockroaches everywhere and huge rats active at night. Once, a rat bit my young Tanya, so the whole house ran after this rat to show it to the medics and free the child from shots. But I also remember that we

were all friends in these towns and villages, the team was always international, and all the holidays were cheerful and long, even though there was not enough food.

### **Anti-Semitism in Kiev**

We could not imagine somebody saying anything negative or irrespectful about Jews. Apart from punishing it as a crime, according to the Communist Party and Soviet authorities' policy, my husband would never allow it. Once, in 1952, the situation changed in connection with the Doctors' Case. We lived in Poltava, and my mother, with tears in her eyes, told my husband that our neighbor said that our fellow Jews wanted to poison Stalin. Since Stalin was almost a living god for my mother, this offense was horrible to her. Alexey went to talk to the offender. Since their talk did not seem to go the way he wanted, he used his official position and wrote a report to the chief of the political unit of his regiment, where he worked at the time. But to his surprise, the chief of the unit explained to him that he should not worry about it, because the man who offended my mother was not very wrong. Besides, he advised that Alexey, whose wife was Jewish (meaning me), he should keep quiet and low. So, my husband went to talk to the neighbor as man to man. It seems that this talk was much more effective. We never heard anything like that again. Soon after that Stalin died. And this terrible grief united Jews, Russians, and Ukrainians in our regiment. The old and the young cried without hiding their tears. The Soviet people had no idea how to live without their great Stalin. On March 5, the day of his death, two planes crashed in our regiment - one was taking off and another was landing. They collided on the runway. 22 coffins were in the regiment on that day; they were buried on the same day as Stalin.

We came across everyday anti-Semitism in full in Kiev. Then, in 1955, spoken Yiddish was freely heard in the streets. And almost as often as Yiddish was heard, so the word "kikes" was used against us or someone else. My Russian husband Alexey could not tolerate it. Naively he thought that there was no difference between people's nationalities. "A person's good nature is only important, the rest is not so important", he said often. By the way, his many relatives in the Russian village of Tetkino outside Kursk did not object to our marriage. In the very beginning they treated me well and later our relations became very friendly; finally, if they had any family questions, they first discussed them with me and only after that - with Alexey.

In general, the transition to Kiev lifestyle turned out to be hard for us. It was hard to go back to the old memories and Babi Yar. My husband and I, my daughter and our Jewish relatives went to Babi Yar almost every year, practically in secret. That place was dark, wild and dangerous. Rumors had it that the authorities were planning to build a stadium there.

I did not go to work. I worked around the house and helped my daughter to study. It was hard for my husband to start living civilian life. He began to work at the air factory and later was transferred to the design bureau of famous aircraft designer Antonov. He worked there until his retirement. It was hard for him to take the changes in the nature of relations as compared with his military brotherhood.

The exposure of the Stalin cult was very difficult for all of our families, both Jewish and Russian. For us, he was the highest authority, an example of a true person and a state leader. Even prior to the war our family had a tradition that at our family celebrations, even at birthday parties, the first toast was the toast to the health of Comrade Stalin. Even the death of my uncle's brother changed

nothing in this regard. And 20 years later, it was hard to accept that everything we believed in were lies.

After these lies we became suspicious of everything. We also were skeptical about the existence of Israel. It seemed to us that it was all a nice joke. We had only Soviet sources of information about Israel. And in general, it all was too far from our everyday life of the end of the 1950s, when we had to do our best to forget that we were Jewish in order to live in peace, so that my daughter would study peacefully as well, because she had already run across anti-Semitism in her school.

The Jewish language, Yiddish, was gradually disappearing, as well as our Jewish names. Sometimes on purpose, other times - for pronunciation reasons, they were turned into Russian names: Moishe - Misha, Izya - Igor. And me, Basya, became Asya, not on purpose, but because my Russian neighbors found it easier to say it this way. In Jewish families full names were no longer given to children in honor of their late relatives - only the first letter of the name was left, the rest of the name was Russian, for instance: in honor of Leib or Lazar a boy was named Leonid, in honor of Rivka a girl was named Raisa. Before the end of 1970s I did not even know where the only Kiev synagogue was located. So, I was very surprised when my daughter Tatyana, who, as I believed, was brought up in the spirit of internationalism, when she was going to get her passport in 1964, demanded that in the "nationality" line she would be registered as Jewish. It was correct, but impossible. This so-called "fifth line" in the passport, that is, Jewish nationality, could put an end to her further career, institute studies, finding a good job; it threatened to cause a lot of troubles. I sincerely wanted her to register as Russian, according to her father's nationality, while my husband believed she could choose whatever nationality she wanted. He still did not understand the peculiarities of our Jewish fate. Neither begging nor explanations could influence her - only my bitter tears shed for many days impacted her, and she did what I wanted from her. I still don't understand what it was - a protest on her part, her ethnic identification or the fact that on the example of her Jewish friends she could see a special attitude towards the Jews. To be frank, I need to say that anti-Semitism did not affect me personally. It did not hinder my career, or my work, or my Communist Party membership, which started when I was 19. I was more concerned about those who were with me. My Jewish relatives became fewer and fewer. In 1954, my mother died; a few years before that Aunt Liza was gone, and then Uncle Yakov. However, in 1960s, my brother Yosif came home from the army. By the way, he received a second higher education - he graduated from the Higher Military Engineer Academy in Leningrad. After coming back to Kiev he found a job at the military plant, where he worked at a very high office until his death in 1981. He could not register his sons, Vova and Boris, as the Russians, because he divorced his first wife, who was Russian, and married a Jewish woman. But, being an optimist, he believed his boys would fight their ways in this life somehow.

In 1966, my Tanya finished school with honors and entered University, philosophy department, which was another surprise for us. Prior to that she had finished music school (playing violin), and we hoped she would continue her musical education in the musical college. However, she chose a different path, and in general she became independent then. I could start working again. I certainly did not go back to my previous, semi-military profession. Having finally completed my secondary education at the age of 40, I went to work at the structure of the Education Ministry. I worked there till 1985, when my granddaughter Katya was born.



In the 1970s, life around us was slowly changing, and I could find my place in it. I became a trade union leader at my work. At the same time more people began to emigrate to Israel. There was an instruction, coming either from the party or from the Soviet authorities, according to which trade union leaders had to do explanatory work with those who were going to emigrate. I had to do it many times, and it was always hard for me. It was a little easier because the first to leave was our director, in 1975. The next step according to this instruction was a special meeting with these people to expel them from the Communist Party if they were its members. It was a very painful procedure. We all tried to escape it, and there was a method: when a person knew he would leave, he had to quit his job, leave the party ranks and work somewhere as a street cleaner, for instance; he had to put himself in such a position that he would have nothing in common with his previous work. It made situation easier for him because he did not have to blush in front of his work team where he had worked for a long time, and it made the situation easier for the organization that had to do such a thing to him. The first people who left - in 1970s - seemed to have disappeared without any trace. Technically, correspondence with them was very complicated, and literally, it was dangerous for those who were left here and received letters from abroad. In the 1980s the situation began to change. We began to get news from those who left for another world, which was so unlike ours. We learned that their lives there went well. The attitude towards them began to change, first unofficially. My attitude was also changing, even though I was still against emigration. I thought we were being deceived again. Besides, I remembered the words of my mother in evacuation in the Urals. She said she was willing to go back to Kiev even if there would be no place to stay; she was willing to kiss the rocks of the Kiev streets, so that she would only stay home. I still think the same way. By the end of the 1980s, my few relatives also began to leave. They were leaving for the United States, Israel, even Australia, and we remained even fewer in Kiev. Correspondence with our relatives became more and more legal and free, and gradually communications with the free world became a tradition in our family.

By the end of the 1980s, there were much less Jews in Kiev, but my family increased: in 1985, my long-awaited granddaughter Katya was born. Her father, Tatyana's husband, is Viktor Malakhov, son of the famous sculptor, Aaron Foterma, and Belarussian doctor Tamara Malakhova. When he finished school and could not enter the medical institute after having passed practically all exams with excellent marks, he changed his last name for his mother's. Then he entered the philosophy department of the University, where he studied together with my daughter. They have been living and working together for the past 20 years.

My husband and I doted upon our granddaughter. His last words before he died in 1991 were concerning her. Unfortunately, he did not live to see her as a student and did not know that in the third grade her parents transferred Katya to the first Jewish national school of Kiev, which she finished with honors this year.

My granddaughter Katya is a person of the new time that began for us in 1991. She is absolutely free in her political, religious and national choices. Her father is Doctor of Philosophy and Professor of the National University in Kiev. This year, Katya passed exams with a very high rating and entered two universities at once: the National "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" University and the State Jewish Solomon University. She studies at the philosophy department. Even now she speaks fluent Russian, Ukrainian, English, and Hebrew. She knows the Jewish tradition well. She loves reading the Torah and Talmud in original. It was with her that the Jewish tradition came back to our home.

Katya tells me that the most valuable thing in life is free choice. She is probably right. But it is not easy for me to understand her. Neither in my childhood nor in the rest of my life did I have such freedom, but I also understand what a dear price was paid for this freedom.

I remember that my mother, being young, told me how in the 1920s, a famous Kiev rabbi invited her to join his family in their emigration to America. And she, a daughter of rich parents, from whom Revolution confiscated everything they had, nevertheless decided to stay in her motherland - and she never regretted it. I think I have her character; only at home I can enjoy full rights of a person. But I understand that my viewpoint is not the only right one, and it is very good that the whole world is now open. Let them leave freely, and let them be free to come back should they decide to do so. The most important thing, according to my granddaughter, is free choice. A free choice to remain really human. I am very glad that my Kiev is becoming more and more not only Ukrainian, but also Jewish: Jewish schools, synagogues, theaters, "Khesed Avot" - this is all very good; I just want people to live in peace. Because there is probably no greater evil than mutual hatred. I am especially afraid of national and religious hatred. And if religions or nationalities are able to separate people and make them hate one another, then something is wrong in this world. Because the most important thing is for all people to be happy. And they need very little for this: mind, kindness and peace of heart.