

Rachil Lemberg

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Uzhhorod

Ukraine

Interviewer: Inna Galina

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Rachil Lemberg lives with her daughter and granddaughter in a 3-bedroom apartment in a new district of Uzhhorod. Their apartment is very clean. Rachil Lemberg is short and slender. She has some health problems, suffering at times with her sight and hearing. Rachil's daughter Yelena, a music teacher, spends as much time with her mother as possible. Rachil is a quick-witted woman with a wry sense of humor. There are modern pictures of abstract art on the walls. They are Rachil's granddaughter's works, a student at an art school.



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Family Background

I didn't know my paternal grandfather. He died long before I was born. All I know is that his name was Shaleh Lemberg. I have dim memories about my paternal grandmother. Her name was Feiga Lemberg. Her non-Jewish neighbors called her Fania. I don't know her date or place of birth, or her maiden name. She was a short thin woman. She wore dark clothes, long skirts and a dark kerchief on her head. My grandmother lived in the small town of Ananiev in Odessa region [320 km from Kiev, 160 km from Odessa [1](#), where our family lived. My grandmother lived with my father's sister. I don't know how deeply religious my grandmother was. She talked with me in poor Russian and she spoke Yiddish with my parents. My grandmother died in 1926, when I was still a child. I cannot say anything about her funeral. I was too young and was not allowed to be at the funeral.

Ananiev was quite a big town for its time. Its population constituted about 50 thousand people. There was Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish population and a minor number of Romanians and Moldavians. Jews didn't have their own neighborhood. They lived among non-Jewish neighbors. There was no anti-Semitism in Ananiev. All people were good neighbors and supported each other. There was a synagogue and a Jewish school in the town and there was a shochet. The majority of Jews were craftsmen and tradesmen. I don't think there were orthodox Jews, but the situation

might have been different when my father was a child I just don't know. My father told me little about his childhood and youth.

My father Khuna Lemberg was born in Ananiev in 1885. He was the oldest child in the family. His sister Golda, though I might be wrong about her name, was born after him. My father's favorite brother Bencion who was 10 years younger than my father, was the youngest child in the family. My father's sister was incurably ill since childhood and didn't get any education due to her health condition. She couldn't go to work either. She was an invalid, actually. She never got married and lived with her mother. She died shortly before grandmother died.

My father and his brother Bencion finished a Jewish 7-year school in Ananiev. It wasn't a religious school. I don't know whether my father and his brother attended cheder. My father was very smart. When he was young he got enthusiastic about revolutionary ideas. My father told me that he and his friend, a Jewish boy, used to go to the attic where they read books of communist ideologists. Actually, my father didn't go farther than reading. He never got involved with any revolutionary groups. My father had beautiful handwriting. He could write in Russian and read and write in Yiddish. However, neither my father nor his brother could continue their education since they had to go to work to support the family. I don't know who was breadwinner in the family before my father went to work at the age of 13. He became a worker at a buttry.

His brother also went to work at a mill. Bencion married Ida, a Jewish girl. They had two daughters. Klavdia, their older daughter, was 5 or 6 years older than I. I've forgotten their younger daughter's name. She died in Ananiev in the late 1930s. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War [2](#) Bencion was recruited to the army and perished. It seems that he perished when he served in a partisan unit. His wife Ida and their daughter were in evacuation in Siberia. After the war Ida's relative took them to Odessa where she resided. Klavdia got married. Her marital name was Klikshtein. Her only son Yefim was born in 1950. In the late 1970s Klavdia and her husband moved to Israel and I lost contact with her. Her son Yefim finished a military school and was a professional military. I don't know why he did not want to emigrate to Israel with his parents. Perhaps, he was content with his life in Russia or authorities did not let him go considering that he was a military and might have been aware of some important state secrets. It often happened so. He served somewhere in Russia and his wife and daughter were with him there. He retired at the age of 43 after having served 20 years. Yefim died in Odessa in 1995 after he had turned 45.

I didn't know my mother's parents. They died long before I was born. Her father's name was Moisey Rabinovich and my grandmother's name was Rachil. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. My grandmother was a housewife. They lived in Ananiev, but I don't know their place or date of birth.

There were six daughters in the family. The oldest daughter's name was Esther. I don't know their dates of birth. All I know is who was older than my mother and her younger sisters. After Esther Haika was born. My mother Sosl was the third daughter. Later she had the Russian name of Sophia written in her passport [3](#). She was born in 1887. Then my mother's younger sisters Frieda, Zisl and Munia were born. All I know is that there wasn't a big difference in age between the sisters. They were born a year or a year and half one after another.

My mother's sisters left the town after getting married. I don't know their family names. Esther and her husband lived in Poltava [320 km from Kiev]. They had two sons. My mother's sister Haika, her

husband and two daughters lived in Pervomaisk, Nikolaev region [280 km from Kiev]. During WWII she was evacuated to Central Asia, - I don't know exactly where they were - with her children and died there. Zisl, her husband and their children also lived in Pervomaisk. I don't have any information about her family during or after WWII. My mother's sister Frieda got married and moved to a kolkhoz [4](#) in Povolzhie [Editor's note: Povolzhie - region along the Volga river, primarily agricultural, known to have the most fertile soil in Russia; there are also many industrial cities there] with her husband. Her husband was either an agronomist or a vet. Frieda was the prettiest of all sisters with fine features and huge black eyes. Frieda had one son. In the 1920s Frieda's little son fell ill with tuberculosis. There was no doctor or even a nurse in their distant village. Frieda couldn't afford proper treatment or even proper food for her son. Her son died. His death was too much for Frieda and she committed a suicide by hanging herself. Munia got married shortly before WWII. She moved to Russia with her husband and I lost track of her. It's hard to say how religious my mother's sisters were. My mother corresponded with them, but after WWII I lost contact with them.

My mother never told me about her childhood. I don't know whether her family was religious, but I think it was. My mother was religious. She observed traditions more strictly than my father. I think she was raised this way. She could read prayers in Hebrew. She had an old book of prayers. I guess she received it when a child. My mother had some education. She could read and write in Yiddish and Russian.

My parents were neighbors. They knew each other and got married in 1909. I think they had a traditional Jewish wedding. This was common at the time. After the wedding they moved to Liubashivka village Odessa region [310 km from Kiev, 165 km from Odessa]. I don't know for whatever reason they moved. All of the children, but me, were born there. My sister Betia was born in 1910. Her Russian name was Bella. The next child in the family was my brother Borukh, born in 1913. His Russian name was Boris. My brother Shloime was born in 1917. His Russian name was Semyon. My father went to work for an owner of a mill and my mother was a housewife. After the revolution of 1917 [5](#) the mill was expropriated [6](#) by the state. My father began to earn much less and his earnings were not enough to support the family. My parents decided to go back to Ananiev. My mother was already pregnant with me at the time. She told me it was impossible to buy fabric to make a new dress and she made a sacking skirt. I was born in Ananiev in 1921. I was named Rachil after my maternal grandmother.

Growing Up

After moving to Ananiev my parents rented an apartment until they managed to buy an apartment in a small house with the money their relatives helped them to collect. In another section of the house an old Jewish woman and her daughter lived. We had three rooms and big kitchen with a Russian stove [7](#) in our section of the house. There were smaller stoves to heat the rooms. Since coal was much too expensive the stoves were stoked with wood. There were few fruit trees, a vegetable garden and few facilities in the backyard of the house. We fetched water from a well not far from the house.

There was a children's room, my parents' bedroom and the third room was occupied by my mother's single sisters Haika and Munia. There was plain furniture in the apartment. The only expensive piece in the house was my parents' bed of dark wood with carved curved back. My

father was a scale operator at the mill. My mother was a housewife. She did all housework by herself. However, she wanted to have additional earnings and she bought a “Singer” sewing machine to sew at home. Other villagers paid her with food or money. I remember that our Ukrainian neighbor gave us milk for my mother’s sewing. It was hard to buy food products at the time. My mother made bread from corn flour for a week. She covered it with linen napkins and it didn’t get stale for a while. I cannot tell whether my family followed kashrut since I was too young and didn’t quite notice things of this kind. On Friday morning my mother baked bread for a week and two challot for Sabbath. She also cooked food for two days. There was always delicious gefilte fish on Sabbath. My mother also made chicken bakes with kneidlakh and cholent that she cooked in the oven. We always had cholent on the following day. My mother left it in the oven overnight and it kept warm until our meal on Saturday. On Friday evening my mother lit candles and prayed over them. We, children, were not taught to pray. My father was against it. He believed that since the had changed and we lived during the Soviet regime that was against religion [8](#), we had to face this fact and accept it. My father said that Jews had to adjust and be no different from others. My father wasn’t religious at the time when I knew him. He almost always worked on Saturday. Saturday became a day off only in the late 1960s. It was officially a working day before. Our parents spoke Russian and Yiddish to us. Both languages were native to me.

My mother went to the synagogue on all Jewish holidays. She put on her best silk dress and a silk shawl. On weekdays she wore a plain calico kerchief like many other Jewish and non-Jewish women in Ananiev. Before I went to school my mother took me with her. My father accompanied her to the synagogue and then came back home. He used to read a lot. He borrowed Russian classics from a library. My mother arranged celebration of all holidays at home. She did a general cleanup before Pesach and took down special crockery from the attic. She baked matzah and cooked traditional Jewish food for the holiday. My father didn’t conduct seder at Pesach. I don’t remember celebration of Jewish holidays in our family. I think we just had a fancy meal after my mother came home from the synagogue. At Yom Kippur my mother fasted 24 hours. Nobody else fasted in the family. I also remember Chanukkah. My mother lit another candle in a big bronze candle stand every day. Our relatives visited us and gave us some small change that we spent buying sweets.

I also remember my father brother Bencion’s wedding. He and Ida had a traditional Jewish wedding. My mother made me a new dress to wear to Bencion’s wedding. It was a rare occasion and I remember this event. I remember a chuppah and how a rabbi conducted the ceremony. Then there was a party and guests sang and danced. I also sang a children’s song. I liked singing. I had a good voice and a good pitch.

There were no national conflicts in Ananiev. At Easter our Christian neighbors brought us Easter bread and painted eggs. We gave them matzah and all children enjoyed nibbling at it. There was no anti-Semitism.

My sister and brothers studied at the Jewish 7-year school. I went to this same school in 1928. It was a common Soviet lower secondary school. We studied all subjects in Yiddish. I knew Yiddish since childhood. I studied well at school. I liked mathematic and physics. At school I was called Rusia and since then I was called with this affectionate name. I enjoyed studying at school. I attended a vocal club and took part in school concerts singing in a quartet. We sang folk songs in Yiddish and Russian. I became a young Octobrist [9](#) and then a pioneer at school. Our pioneer activities involved gathering of scrap metal and waste paper. There was competition between

classes and those who gathered the biggest quantities gained the first place. Once a week we had political classes and pupils made reports about political events in the USSR and across the world. We were raised with the conviction that the USSR was the best country in the world and that Soviet children were the happiest in the world and that we owed this to our leaders Lenin [10](#) and Stalin. We were even taught to say 'Granfather Lenin' and 'Granfather Stalin'. There were their portraits in each classroom and this was a mandatory attribute of our life.

I had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. There was a family of Stepanovs few houses away from where we lived. Anisim Stepanov, the father of the family, worked as a shop assistant and Maria Stepanova, the mother, was a housewife. They had two sons: Sergey, born in 1923, and Yevgeni, born in 1919. Yevgeni and I became friends when we were children. We played together and I felt a part of the family in their home. I often had lunch with them. When I turned 13 she began to call me their daughter-in-law. She said she wanted us to get married when we grew up. Of course, this only made me laugh at the time.

In 1932-33 there was famine [11](#) in Ukraine. The situation was easier in towns while in villages people were dying of starvation. Our situation was very hard, but I don't remember anyone to have starved to death. My father went to work in Russia where the situation was better and my mother had to support the family. She went to work in a diner and every day she brought her earnings home: a bowl of soup and half a loaf of bread for all of us. My mother also took a piglet to feed and then sell it. My mother was very upset about having to keep a pig. According to Jewish religion pigs are improper animals, but we had to survive. We didn't eat pork, but when we sold the pig the money we got helped us a lot. Every now and then my father sent us some food or money. We somehow managed to live through this hard time and then life began to improve.

After I finished the 7th grade I went to the 8th grade of a Ukrainian secondary school. My brothers and sister also went to this school. Two of my classmates went to school with me and the others were concerned about their poor Ukrainian and didn't continue their education. I did very well at school. I was number three in my class by the end of the 8th grade. In the 8th grade I joined Komsomol [12](#). I was very proud of it, though actually it didn't change anything. All I remember about my Komsomol membership was mandatory attendance of dull meetings.

Arrests in 1937 [13](#) had no impact on our family. At our political classes we were informed about political or military leaders who were arrested as enemies of the people. We believed what we were told and didn't give it much thought. My father was a worker and so were other families that we knew. Those arrests did not involve common people.

My older sister and brothers went to a Ukrainian school after finishing the 7th grade of the Jewish school. After finishing this secondary school my sister went to Poltava [250 km from Kiev] where my mother's older sister Esther lived. She entered the Faculty of Economics in the College of Public Industry in Poltava. She stayed with Esther. When Bella was a 3-year student she married Samuel Gladshtein who was a 4-year student of the Construction College. He was her cousin and Jewish rules allow marriages between cousins. They registered their marriage in a registry office and in the evening they had a wedding party where they invited their closest friends and relatives. I came to the wedding with my parents and my two brothers were also there. Boris was a student in Pervomaisk where my mother's sister Haika and her family lived. He studied at the Mechanic Faculty of Machine Building College in Pervomaisk. My brother Semyon also entered this same

Faculty later. Boris finished this College in 1937 and received a job assignment [14](#) in a design office of the machine building plant in Kharkov, 450 km from Kiev, east of Ukraine. Boris lived in a hostel in Kharkov. He liked his job.

After finishing school I wanted to continue my studies in the Construction College in Odessa [470 km from Kiev]. This was a big town and it wasn't too far from Ananiev. However, my mother was against it. She thought Odessa was not a good idea for a girl to live there alone. She said there were loose morals in big towns and it would be hard for me to get adjusted to them. My mother insisted that I went to Poltava to her sister Esther. My sister Bella and her husband also lived there. In 1936 their first son Valentin was born. Their second son Yevgeni was born in 1938, when I came to Poltava to enter college.

I passed my entrance exams with all excellent marks and was admitted to the Faculty of Civil and Industrial Construction. I could live in a hostel. But my aunt Esther insisted that I lived with them. I studied well and took part in the amateur art club and choir. I had a few Jewish group mates, but we faced no prejudiced attitudes. I had Jewish and non-Jewish friends in college. I spent my winter and summer vacations with my parents in Ananiev. Of course, I missed home a lot. When all of us left home to study my mother began to keep pigs to sell them. She needed money to support us. We received small stipends. It was too little to make a living and my mother sent us money and food with every occasion she could get. I remember that my mother brought me a winter coat with a calf fur collar, a pair of shoes and a light blue cut of fabric. I remembered this for the rest of my life since at that time it was very difficult to buy clothes or shoes. I wore my older sister's clothes or my mother altered her clothes for me.

In 1938 my brother Semyon got married. He was tall and handsome. He met his Jewish wife Rieva in Pervomaisk. They were fellow students, only Rieva was 1 or 2 years junior. Semyon brought Rieva to Ananiev on winter holidays and on summer vacations they registered their marriage in a registry office. They were both students. Semyon was to finish his last year in College when disaster happened. Semyon fell ill with viral encephalitis in 1939. He was paralyzed. My mother went to Moscow with his medical records that she took to the institute of diseases of nervous system. They said they could try to help my brother, but they could give no promises about results. And we didn't take my brother to Moscow: it was too difficult to do this. My parents took my brother to Ananiev from Pervomaisk. Semyon was absolutely helpless. He couldn't eat, wash or dress himself. My mother attended to him. In a warm season my brother sat on the verandah that my father made specifically for him. There was a big black plate-shaped radio on the verandah. It was always on since when we they turned it off it made my brother terribly nervous. His whole life focused on this radio. My mother had a very hard life having to take care of the household and tend to Semyon. My father called Semyon's wife Rieva to come to Ananiev. He convinced her that she could have a different life since she was still young and she didn't have to spend her life with her hopelessly ill husband. My father made arrangements for Semyon and Rieva to get divorced. This was done in secret from Semyon about it not to upset him.

When I came home on vacation after finishing my second year in college in 1940 I met Yulik Rabinovich, my former classmate from the Jewish school who also came to Ananiev on vacation. His parents lived in Ananiev and he studied in the Construction College in Odessa. Yulik confessed that he had loved me all these years. He went to tell my parents that we were going to get married after finishing our studies and ask their consent to my moving to study in Odessa. However strange

it was for me my parents gave their consent and I got a transfer to Odessa Construction College. I lived in a hostel. There were three of us sharing a room: I, another Jewish girl from Vinnitsa Dora Salomon and a Ukrainian girl. Dora was one year older than me, and the Ukrainian girl was the same age with me. We became friends. After classes Yulik and I went for walks, to the cinema or theaters. My childhood friend Yevgeni's mother Maria Stepanova, who came to visit her relatives in Odessa often visited me. On 20 June 1941, after passing my last exam I went to my parents in Ananiev. On 22 June 1941 we heard on the radio that WWII began. I remember Molotov's speech [15](#). He spoke about perfidious attack of Germany. Stalin also spoke on the radio. Stalin said that we would win the war and I believed it.

During the War

My father was very concerned about my return to Odessa. He said that he and mother were not communists and Germans wouldn't touch them while a young girl should leave the town before German soldiers entered it. My parents couldn't leave my brother and it was impossible to evacuate him. Therefore, they stayed in the town, but they insisted that I evacuated with the family of their good Jewish acquaintance Lev Sheinberg. I allowed my father to convince me. I was sure that nothing bad would happen to them. I was so sure that the war was to be over soon that I didn't even take my parents' photographs with me. Lev Sheinberg was director of the mill where my father worked. They had known each other for years. I evacuated on a horse-driven carriage with his family: his wife Golda, three daughters and a niece and Clara Oreshnik, a teacher of history from the Jewish school, and her baby.

We traveled 7 days under continuous bombing. Sometimes we rode on bigger roads, but it was more difficult considering heavy traffic: trucks, military equipment and carriages. Kolkhozniks [members of collective farms] also evacuated cattle to not leave it to Germans. We could move there very slowly and German planes often bombed bigger roads. Lev tried to take smaller ground roads. We reached Stalingrad in 1000 km from home. Lev left our horses and the carriage in an official agency and obtained a certificate that he had done so. We stayed at the evacuation agency where they were telling us to stay in Stalingrad. The teacher and her baby stayed in the town. Lev told me and his daughters to go back to the evacuation agency to beg them to give us evacuation sheets to move farther on. We obtained evacuation permits to go to Shap Kungurskiy, a distant village in the Ural mountains. We covered over 3000 km. Nobody ever heard the name of this village. We got on a train for cattle transportation to go on our way again. I cannot remember how long the trip took us, but it seemed very long to me. When we arrived we were accommodated in a local house. Its owner, whose husband and sons were at the front, was alone there. She gave us a big room with a Russian stove. There was no place to sleep. Lev had a big carpet that he took from home. We put it on the floor and slept on it. When we began to unpack I saw that my father packed my mother's winter coat and our only down blanket. He probably presumed that they wouldn't need them any longer.

Lev's older daughter finished three years of the Pedagogical College. She went to work at the local primary school. I went to work as a teacher in a kindergarten. The rest went to work in a kolkhoz. Lev became director of the kolkhoz farm and he helped his daughter to get the position of assistant accountant at the farm. His wife Golda stayed at home. It was cold. There were frozen potatoes and cabbages left in the fields. We picked potatoes for the winter. It tasted awful, but we had no choice. They were supposed to pay for work in the kolkhoz with bread, but it was rarely delivered to the

village and there was little of it. Sometimes Golda could stand in line for a day and came home with no bread. Almost a year passed. Lev and his wife were like parents taking care of me.

In autumn 1942 Lev's older daughter went to Perm where her college had evacuated to continue her studies. Lev's younger daughters, his niece and I were sent to the labor front in Solikamsk [2100 from Kiev]. Lev still had some money and valuables with him. He gave us all he had.

In Solikamsk we were sent to the construction of facilities for a plant that was to arrive in evacuation. Since I had finished three years of studies in a construction college I was appointed construction superintendent. Lev's daughters and niece became laborers on the construction site. We received workers' cards for food and had a free meal at the construction site.

I had no information about my family. There was a search bureau where I kept writing hoping to get some information about my sister and brothers and my mother's sisters. Every time I received the same answer: 'We have no information'. However, they gave me the address of my co-tenant in the hostel of Odessa Construction College Dorah Salomon. She lived in Tashkent. I began to correspond with her. She was the only person from my prewar life whom I managed to find. Dora told me that our college evacuated to Tashkent. Dora was the last-year student and worked as a clerk at the passport office in the hostel. She called me to Tashkent. She said I could continue my studies in college and live in the hostel. Besides, it was warm in Tashkent, which was important for me. Dora was also going to write her diploma paper in spring and offered me to replace her at work.

Once I went on business trip to Tomsk [300 km from Solikamsk]. I was supposed to accompany a group of men who were not subject to army service due to their health condition and were to come to the labor front in Solikamsk. I had a letter of credit to receive money for our return trip in Tomsk. I went to the central post office in Tomsk. It was a huge building where it was next to impossible to recognize a person even standing nearby. I was going upstairs and all of a sudden I saw my brother Boris coming downstairs! So we met. We sat there on the staircase crying. Boris evacuated to Tomsk with his plant. My brother was also searching for me and our sister, but he didn't succeed. When I returned to Solikamsk I received his letter with my sister's address in it. She and her sons and my mother's sister Esther, her mother-in-law, were in evacuation in Uzbekistan, in Yangiyul village near Tashkent, in 3300 km from home and 2000 km from me. Her husband was in the army. Bella was controls manager at the tinned food plant. When I heard that my sister was near Tashkent I decided to accept Dora's invitation to go to Tashkent. I attended classes in the morning and in the afternoon I went to work as Dora's replacement in the passport office. We didn't have enough food, but grapes supported us. During the grape harvesting season we went to pick grapes in a nearby kolkhoz and the kolkhoz paid us with grapes. We ate some and took the rest to fruit traders at the market. We bought bread for the money we got. I finished the fourth year of studies in college in Tashkent. I met my aunt Ida, my father's brother Bencion's wife, and her daughter there. They had a miserable life and I gave them all money I had with me. My aunt appreciated it and recalled it many times afterward.

My childhood friend Rosa Litvin found me in Tashkent. We studied together in the Jewish school and lived in neighboring houses in Ananiev. Rosa wrote me from Samarkand in 270 km from Tashkent. She lived there with her mother and worked. Her father perished at the front. Rosa worked at a construction site in Samarkand. She wrote me that she would continue her studies

after the war was over and that at the moment she had to survive. She called me to come to Samarkand and I decided to move to the construction site there. My friend Yulik Rabinovich's mother lived there. He was my boyfriend who was planning to marry me after the war. She told me that Yulik went to the army and perished at the front. She received a notification about it. It was a tragedy for me. I loved Yulik and was thinking of marrying him.

I worked at the construction site in Samarkand until the end of the war. They paid more and I had sufficient food for the first time in 4 years of war. I corresponded with my brother and sister. On 9 May 1945 I was at work. I stood on a hill when I saw a crowd of people marching from the construction site with flags. I understood right away that it was the victory. We hugged greeting each other. There were fireworks in the evening.

After the War

I started thinking about going back home. My sister wanted to stay in Uzbekistan. After the war she moved to Tashkent with her family. Aunt Esther died in Tashkent in the late 1940s. I couldn't come to her funeral. Bella's husband perished at the front. She worked and raised her sons. My sister never remarried. Her sons finished school and received higher education. Valentin, my older nephew, moved to the USA in the 1970s with his family. He died from brain cancer in 1986. His children live in the USA. I don't have contacts with them. My younger nephew Yevgeni moved to Lipetsk in Russia in the 1970s. His wife's family lived there. When my sister retired from work she went to live with Yevgeni. She lived with his family until she died. My brother reevacuated to Kharkov with his plant. He lived there all his life. My brother probably had women friends, but he remained single. I corresponded with my brother and sister and we occasionally visited each other. My brother and sister died in 2001. My brother died on 17 September and my sister died on 2 November. On 28 October 2001 she turned 90. They were both buried in the Jewish sector of town cemeteries. My brother was buried in Kharkov and my sister – in Lipetsk. They were atheists.

I returned to Ananiev. Our house wasn't ruined and there were no other tenants in it. My neighbors told me what happened after I left Ananiev. On that same day when I left with Lev Sheinberg's carriage Germans dropped bombs on the outskirts of Ananiev. Many people perished on the roads. My mother was terrified that I might have been one of them. Then Germans came to the town. They established a Jewish ghetto in Zheltkovo station in 15 km from Ananiev. My mother and father were taken to the ghetto and Semyon remained at home. Germans did not allow people to enter Jewish houses. When one of our neighbors dared to come into our house he saw my brother lying dead on the floor. Our neighbors buried Semyon. My parents were killed in the ghetto among other Jews. I don't even know where their grave is. Most of the Jews who were in evacuation returned to Ananiev. Lev Sheinberg's family returned and so did teacher Clara Oreshnik and her son and many others. My friend Rosa Litvin, who convinced me to move to Samarkand, and her mother lived in Ananiev. We corresponded with her. She died last year.

I lived in Ananiev several days. Our Russian neighbor Maria Stepanova, my childhood friend Yevgeni's mother, took me to their home. Yevgeni was at the front during the war and after the war he stayed to serve in Germany. I couldn't stay in the house where I spent my childhood years and where everything breathed with the memories of my family. I decided to leave. I didn't care where to go. All I wished was to go elsewhere. I didn't take anything from my home. Lev Sheinberg sold the houses and gave me the money. I gave Bella and Boris their share.

Then I moved to Odessa. I received my college record book from Tashkent. I needed it to continue my studies in the Construction College. However, I was admitted to the second semester of the third year in college in 1946 while in Tashkent I was a 4-year student. I missed a lot and such was their decision. I rented a room. My share of the money I received for selling our house lasted for half a year of my life in Odessa. Food was very expensive after the war and the only place one could buy food products was at the market. A slice of bread cost 10 rubles.

In 1946 my childhood friend Yevgeni Stepanov found me in Odessa. He was still on service in a town in the Eastern Germany. There was a housing area for Soviet military. It was a nice cozy town called Galle. It stood on the Zalle River (Galle-under-Zalle). He wrote me long tender letters every day. Our correspondence lasted half a year. In summer Yevgeni came on leave and registered our marriage in a registry office. He came on a 45-day leave and then he had to go back to Germany. He sent me money. In 1947, after my fourth year in college was over I went to visit my husband. He lived in a 3-bedroom apartment with his comrade fellow family. They occupied two rooms and Yevgeni lived in the third room. I have very pleasant memories about four months I spent with my husband in this town. In autumn I returned to college in Odessa. In 1948 after finishing the college I received a job assignment to Bolekhov village in Ivano-Frankovsk region [550 km from Kiev], in Western Ukraine. My husband submitted a report for transfer to the military unit in Bolekhov. His report was approved. We received a room in Bolekhov and I went to work as superintendent at a construction site. In 1949 our son Anatoli was born. We lived there 3 years until in 1952 my husband was transferred to Lvov. He went there, but since he didn't receive an apartment my son and I stayed in Bolekhov where my daughter Yelena was born in 1955. In Lvov my husband served until 1956. Yevgeni was a wonderful caring husband and a good father. After he moved to Lvov I didn't work. After he received a two-bedroom apartment in Lvov we all moved to Lvov. I was a housewife. In 1956 my husband got a transfer to Uzhhorod in Subcarpathia [16](#). Yevgeni served there until he retired in 1960. We received an apartment in Uzhhorod. In 1958 I worked to work at the Giprograd construction design institute. I didn't change my surname after I got married. I didn't want anyone to think that I wanted to disguise my nationality with the Russian surname of Stepanov. I kept my typically Jewish surname of Lemberg. I had no problems with getting a job. I never faced anti-Semitism at work. I got along well with my colleagues and management. I worked in Giprograd until I retired in 1977.

In 1953 Stalin died. I remember that it was a great shock for me. It was also hard for Yevgeni. It seemed like the end of the world to us. My husband and I asked the same question as many other people: how we should live on and whether it was possible to live without Stalin. Then the 20th Party Congress [17](#) took place. Nikita Khrushchev [18](#) spoke about Stalin's crimes and the regime of terror that ruled in the USSR. Yevgeni was a Party member. They discussed the speech of Khrushchev before it was published in central newspapers. I cannot say that I believed what Khrushchev said at once, but later I understood that everything he said was true.

In 1960 my husband demobilized from the army. Yevgeni went to work as a dispatcher at the machine building plant. My husband and I were atheists and our children were raised like all other Soviet children knowing nothing about religion. We tried to spend as much time with our children as possible. In the evening our family dined together. My husband and I discussed what happened at work during a day and our children spoke about their school. On weekends we went for walks or out of town, to the woods or to the riverbank. We spent vacations in the Crimea or picturesque

spots of Subcarpathia. We celebrated Soviet holidays at home. Our favorite holidays were New Year and Victory Day [19](#). We also celebrated the Soviet Army Day [20](#) since Yevgeni was a military. We had guests in the evening and I cooked for these parties. We also invited friends to birthday parties. We talked and danced. Yevgeni and I went to school concerts on Soviet holidays. Our younger daughter Yelena studied in a secondary and music schools. She always played the piano at school concerts. Our son preferred sciences. Our children never faced anti-Semitism. They had the Russian surname of Stepanov and adopted the Russian nationality. They finished school successfully. After finishing school Yevgeni entered the Faculty of Physics and Mathematic of Uzhhorod University. He did well at the University. After finishing school Yelena entered a Music Higher School.

Before graduation Anatoli got an offer for postgraduate studies, but he decided to go to work to gain experience. Anatoli married Greta Shalamanovich, a Jewish girl from Uzhhorod, born in 1956. In 1975 my first grandson Victor was born. Anatoli's daughter Renata was born in 1982.

When Jews began to move to Israel in the early 1970s my husband and I didn't consider leaving our country. However, we sympathized with our friends and acquaintances who decided to move. It happened that these people were called traitors of their Motherland, but this was an official point of view. Common people were sympathetic. Of course, it was hard to part with close people. At that time people were leaving for good. Who could ever hope to travel or invite their dear ones to visit the USSR. Even corresponding with relatives living abroad was not safe [21](#).

In 1990 Greta's family decided to move to the USA. My son also decided to move there. Of course, I was afraid of parting with him and my grandchildren, but I understood that my son had the right to decide for himself. He lives in Island Park in New Jersey. He and his wife work. Anatoli lectures at the University and his colleagues value him high. His wife worked at a music school in Uzhhorod. In the USA she finished a course of document control assistants and got a job. She worked in a dentist's office some time and now she work for a company. My grandson Victor graduated from the university in New Jersey and now he is a postgraduate student. Renata is a student at this university. She studies Russian. Now Renata is coming on training in Saint Petersburg. She will live in a Russian family to improve her Russian. Of course, Petersburg is far from Uzhhorod, but still it is not as far as USA. Perhaps, my granddaughter will be able to visit me shortly... My son and grandson often call me. I am very happy for them. In 1998 my son visited me. It was a great joy for me. My son stayed here for almost a month. He told me about his life and family and showed photographs. Regretfully, I couldn't travel to visit them due to my health condition.

Yelena got a job assignment in a distant village after finishing her music school. My husband helped her to get a transfer to Mukachevo near Uzhhorod [650 km from Kiev, 40 km from Uzhhorod]. Yelena worked at a music school there and lived with us in Uzhhorod. It took her about two hours to get to work. Yelena worked there 7 years. In 1981 she met her husband to be Ivan Gonchak, Ukrainian. He courted Yelena very nicely. He was a worker at the plant of non-standard equipment in Uzhhorod. They got married in 1982. When she got pregnant it became difficult for her to commute to Mukachevo every day. She had a problem pregnancy and I was very concerned about her condition. My husband and I found people who helped Yelena to get a transfer to Uzhhorod. In 1985 Yelena and Ivan's daughter Yekaterina was born. Some time later Ivan left Yelena and his daughter for another woman. He only recalls Yekaterina on her birthday, although he lives in Uzhhorod. My former son-in-law changed two more wives in the recent years. Yelena

lives with me. It's very hard for Yelena to support the family. She teaches in a music school in Uzhhorod. She receives a very low salary and my pension is small. My son supports us. Yelena loves her job. She also spends much time with her daughter. My granddaughter is a 3rd-year student at the Art College. She is very fond of drawing. Next year she is finishing her college. I think the girl needs a father. It's hard for Yelena to raise her.

When perestroika [22](#) began in the USSR I was a pensioner. I didn't care that much. I never cared about politics. However, I noted the changes. Newspapers and magazines began to publish information that one could only hear on foreign radio before. They also began to publish books by authors who were not allowed in the former USSR like Alexandr Solzhenitsyn [23](#). Anti-Semitism mitigated. USSR residents were allowed to travel abroad and correspond with their relatives and friends living abroad. One couldn't imagine it might be possible before. After Ukraine declared its independence rebirth of the Jewish life began. There were Jewish associations established and newspapers and magazines published. They began to stage Jewish plays in theaters and there are concerts of Jewish music and dances arranged.

My husband died in 1998. Since then I've lived with my daughter and granddaughter. In 1999 Hesed was established in Uzhhorod. It's hard to imagine our life without Hesed now. These people do so much good. I am grateful to all Jews who care about us across the world! They support us a lot. They particularly care about older people and I can feel their care. I receive food packages. They pick my laundry and send a doctor to visit me. They also provide medications. I receive Jewish newspapers for free. They celebrate Jewish holidays and birthdays in Hesed. Unfortunately, I cannot attend these events in Hesed due to my health condition. Other people call me to tell me what's new. Hesed has given me an opportunity to socialize with people. It's very important for me. I've never been religious and I won't become one. This is alien and strange to me, but I am interested in the Jewish history and culture and I read books about this.

Glossary:

[1](#) Odessa

The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41% of the local population. There were 7 big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were cheders in 19 prayer houses.

[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 Common name

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

4 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.

5 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.

6 Nationalization

confiscation of private businesses or property after the revolution of 1917 in Russia.

7 Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in winter time.

8 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.

9 Young Octobrist

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

10 Lenin, (1870-1924)

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

11 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.

12 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.

13 Great Terror (1934-1938)

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

14 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

15 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.

16 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpacie): Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

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.

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.

19 On May, 9 - The Great Patriotic War ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945

This day of a victory was a grandiose and most liked holiday in the USSR.

20 Soviet Army Day

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

21 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.

22 Perestroika

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s. Perestroika [restructuring] was the term attached to the attempts (1985–91) by Mikhail Gorbachev to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratise the Communist party organization. By 1991, perestroika was on the wane, and after the failed August Coup of 1991 was eclipsed by the dramatic changes in the constitution of the union.

23 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander (1918-)

Russian novelist and publicist. He spent eight years in prisons and labor camps, and three more years in enforced exile. After the publication of a collection of his short stories in 1963, he was denied further official publication of his work, and so he circulated them clandestinely, in samizdat publications, and published them abroad. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970 and was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 after publishing his famous book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, in which he describes Soviet labor camps.