

# Evgeniy Kotin

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Moscow

Russia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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*Evgeniy Kotin is of medium height, lean, young-looking man. He is willing to tell a lot about his family. After his wife's death Evgeniy lives by himself in a two-room Khrushchevka apartment [1](#) in the house built in the 1960s. Evgeniy must have loved his wife very much and he enjoys talking about her. He keeps things in the apartment the way it was when his wife was alive. There are a lot of books, photographs, all kinds of knick-knacks that people usually bring from vacation.*

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## My family background

My father's family lived in a small town Kromy, Orel province in Russia [360 km to the South-East of Moscow]. Kromy was the part of the Pale of Settlement [2](#) and Jews were permitted to settle there. I have never met my parental grandfather Moses Kotin, and my father I have never seen him either. Grandmother's name was Hana-Mera. Of course, after getting married her last name was Kotina. I do not know her maiden name nor where my grandparents were born. Grandfather was a photographer. When grandmother was single, she was a seamstress. After getting married she quit work and became a housewife like most of the married Jewish women at that time.

There were 5 people in the family. First daughters were born. The first one was Ekaterina [common name] [3](#), Jewish name Keizlya. Then Faina, Jewish name was Fanya, Raisa, Jewish Rohl and Liya were born. Grandmother craved for a son, and in 1895 a long-awaited son was born. It was my father. Father did not live to rejoice in his son. He died in 3 days after son was born. In accordance with the Jewish tradition the son was named after his deceased father, Moisey.

When grandmother became a widow, she moved to Orel with her children. It was a bigger city as compared to Kromy. Grandmother had to be a bread-winner and there were more opportunities in Orel. She did not get married for the second time as having five children it was problematic for her. Mother took orders and sawed linen. She was sure a good seamstress since they had a pretty good living. Of course, there was no surplus, but at least she earned enough to buy good food and decent clothes. I do not know whether sister got Jewish education, but father went to cheder at the age of 5. Grandmother must have been a very progressive woman and understood that secular

education was very important and Jewish education was not enough. I do not know what pains it took my grandmother to earn money for the tuition for the lyceum. There was a Jewish lyceum in Orel, in which all children finished the full 8-year course.

I do not remember that father told much about his childhood. I do not know how religious grandmother was. I think major Jewish holidays were marked in the family, and that was it. I guess grandmother was very tied-up with work and had hardly any spare time. Yiddish was spoken at home, but everybody including grandmother was fluent in Russian.

Upon annulment of the pale of settlement after the Revolution [4](#), the whole family moved to Moscow. The Soviet regime also cancelled admission quota of the Jews [Five percent quota] [5](#) and everybody had the chance to get higher education. The eldest sister Ekaterina and the third Raisa graduated from medical school. Ekaterina was an obstetrician in the hospital, located out of Moscow, in the town of Balashikha. Raisa worked in the hospital in Moscow. Faina graduated from agronomy faculty of Agricultural Academy and became an agronomist. The youngest sister, Liya, and my father studied at Medicine faculty of Moscow University [M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, the best University in the Soviet Union, also well known abroad for its high level of education and research], and became doctors. Liya was specialized in psychiatry. She was the principal physician of the children's department of mental asylum named after Kaschenko. Father became phthisiatrician and a rontgenologist.

Ekaterina and Faina did not get married. Raisa and Liya were married to Russians. Raisa's husband was Vasiliy, I do not remember his last name. He worked in the controls department of the State bank as an auditor. They had an only son Boris, born in 1918. Boris worked as an architect before WW2. He went through the entire war and served in the engineering troops [Engineering troops was one of the divisions of the Soviet Army. They were involved in design and building of defense and military constructions]. Then he came back to Moscow and worked as an architect. He died in early 1990s. Liya was married to Andrey Fomin. He was a very gifted man. He was the deputy director of the mental asylum, head of logistics. Liya did not change her maiden name after getting married and remained Kotina. They did not have children. Grandmother stayed with her. She was the only one in our family who had her separate apartment; the rest lived in the communal apartments [6](#). Of course, Faina took grandmother in her apartment.

My mother was from the town Bendery, Bessarabia [7](#). Grandfather Leib Laskin was some sort of merchant. I do not remember grandmother's name. The family was large. Out of all of them I knew only elder brother Kopl and sister Manya, who lived in Moscow. The rest had lived in Bendery, Moldova [8](#), all their life. As it had been Romania [9](#) by 1939, mother did not keep in touch with her relatives abroad [10](#). It was dangerous for people who lived in USSR. That was the way the family ties were broken.

My mother Basya Laskina was born in 1893. She said when she met my father, who was younger than she, as per her request it was written in her passport that she was born in 1895. That is why the year of birth in my mother's passport is 1895. Mother thought that wife should not be older than her husband. Her name in passport is Berta. Mother did not tell anything about her childhood and youth. I only know that she graduated from lyceum and went to Odessa [11](#) to study before revolution. No matter what nationality a lady was it was hard for her to acquire a higher education. Mother took courses of dentist assistants. Having finished courses she went to Moscow, where her

siblings lived.

Mother's brother Kopl Laskin was the first from the family to come to Moscow. He came there before revolution. Back at that time Jews were permitted to settle in Moscow only as per special permit of the tsarist exchequer, but it did not refer to Kopl. During WW1 he was in the army as a canoneer. Nowadays it is called firing pointer. Kopl did well at war and was awarded with St. George's Cross [12](#), which was the highest award. He also got other awards. There were very few awardees of the St. George's Cross and even fewer Jews among them. The Jews, who were awarded with St. George's Cross were exempt from the pale of settlement and were allowed to settle whenever they wished. All they had to do was to get registered in the police department of the city they selected. Kopl found a job at some small plant and was involved in logistics. Then mother's sister Maria moved to Moscow. First she lived with Kopl. Then she met his friend Lev Drubetskoy. Then she got married with him and moved to his place. Lev worked as an accountant. Maria studied for a little bit and went to work as a book keeper in the housing department. They did not have children. During NEP [13](#) Kopl and Lev Drubetskoy started their own business. I do not know what was their business like, or was it profitable. In the early 1920s both of them went to Palestine to start business there, but it did not work and they came back to the USSR. When NEP was winding up, they regained their previous professions Kopl was a supplier and Lev was an accountant. Things were calm before repressions [Great Terror] [14](#). In 1937 there was information against Lev regarding his stay abroad, in the capitalistic country. He was tried and sentenced to 10 years in Gulag [15](#) and 5 years in exile. He was sent to the north, to one of the camps. There were production facilities in each of the camps and the convicts were used as free manpower. First Lev was involved in general work, and when the administration found out that he was an accountant he started to work in that field in the camp. When in 1947 his 10-year sentence in the camp was over, he was allowed to choose the place for the exile. Lev wrote to Maria and both of them for some reason decided that he should move to Izhevsk, Udmurtia [1000 km to the East from Moscow]. Lev went to the exile and Maria followed him. They had stayed there for a year and a new wave of repressions had started against Jews [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [16](#). They lived in constant fear. Lev peaked and pined awaiting arrest. In 1949 he committed suicide. Aunt Maria went to Bendery and stayed there till the end of her days. She died in the 1960s.

After finishing studies she went to Moscow to Kopl. He lived in the communal apartment of the former tenancy of the rich people. The hosts must have been either shot or died in the camp and several families moved in a large 7-room apartment. My mother also moved in there. Uncle Kopl made arrangements for mother to move in that apartment. Our family had stayed there by the middle 1970s. The suite of rooms was detached by the doors. The doors between the rooms were nailed down. Kopl's room was the Study of the former owner. We lived in the former drawing-room. There was a bed-room and children's room and each of those was taken by some families. There were two bigger rooms and one smaller room ( probably for the servants) on the other side. The kitchen was huge with a big wood-stove. We remodeled it into gas stove. There was wood water heater, then geyser in the bathroom.

Kopl was married to Galina, a very beautiful Russian woman. He was her second husband. She had a son from the first marriage. In 1926 their daughter Margarita was born. During WW2 [17](#) they were in evacuation. They came back to Moscow. When A-bombs were released by Americans in Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki [1945] Galina developed a maniacal fear for the atomic

bombs. She thought Moscow to become the first target and insisted moving to another town. She chose Perm [1200 km to the East from Moscow] for some reason. She was a real civilian person and was not aware that Perm was the smithery of weapon with the largest artillery plant being located there. Perm would be more likely bombed than Moscow. There they settled on the second floor of the wooden house without conveniences. Uncle Kopl was not young at that time, besides he had heart trouble. He had to fetch the bundles of wood and buckets of water to the second floor. He died shortly after moving to Perm. Galina died in couple of years and their daughter remained by herself. Now she lives in Perm's and from time to time she visits us in Moscow.

My parents met in Moscow. Father was the university student and mother was a dentist assistant after moving to Moscow. I do not know exactly where they met. I assumed it was some sort of a party. Soon they got married. Neither father nor mother observed Jewish traditions, so they had an ordinary wedding – just registered their marriage in the state registration office and a family party in the evening. It was impossible to have a big wedding since the times were hard. After getting married they moved to mother's room. After graduation father got a mandatory job assignment [18](#) in the town Shenkursk, Arkhangelsk oblast [800 km to the North-East from Moscow]. Mother went with him. There in 1921 my sister Rita was born. She had lived there only for 3 years. When Rita got ill, mother took her to Moscow hoping that the doctors in the capital were better and would cure her. However, Rita died in 1924 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. Now that cemetery does not exist. There is a hotel called Ukraine built on that place. In the year of 1924 father, who was specialized in phthiology was transferred to tuberculosis sanatorium of Crimean city Yalta, [now the Crimea Republic, Ukraine, 900 km from Kiev]. I was born in Yalta in 1925. We had lived in Yalta for 2 years and father was offered a job in the sanatorium not far from Moscow to work as phthiatrician and part-time rontgenologist. We came back to Moscow. Father lived in the sanatorium and mother lived with me in our room in Moscow. She came to Moscow on weekends. We spent the whole summer in the sanatorium. In 1929 my younger sister Ella was born.

## Growing up

Parents spoke Russian with us, children and Yiddish between themselves. Then they wanted to conceal something from us they used to speak Yiddish. When some of mother's siblings came over she spoke Yiddish most of the time, though both Maria and Kopl were fluent in Russian. Mother said that when her family lived in Bendery, Yiddish was spoken in her family and it was pleasure to speak the language of her childhood with her kin. When we came to grandmother Hana-Mera both of my parents spoke Yiddish with her. There was a Jewish theatre in Moscow at that time and parents attended all performances. I did not know Yiddish, so parents did not take me there. We did not mark Jewish holidays at home. When I was a child my parents and I went to grandmother Hana-Mera on major Jewish holidays. She marked Jewish holidays. I do not remember the details. I remember that on Pesach grandmother gave my mother a lot of matzah and I liked to munch on that. I also remember that grandmother gave me money on Hanukah and I spent it on lollipops and sunflowers kernels – the tidbits of my childhood. Our family marked only soviet holidays such as – 1 of May , 7th of November [October Revolution Day] [19](#), Soviet Army Day [20](#). Mother cooked festive food. In the morning the whole family went on the festive demonstrations. Then our kin and family friends, father's colleagues came over to us. We danced, sang songs.

Upon return to Moscow mother enrolled on secretary's courses. She learned typing and short-hand. Having finished courses she got the assignment to work as a secretary for the director of the tulle

and lace factory. Then my sister and I went to the kindergarten by the tulle and lace factory. At that time it was deemed that children should be raised in the team. We were nurtured to get used to the team since early childhood. Propaganda of the Soviet mode of life had been spread since the child was in swaddles. I remember how our child-minder in the kindergarten often asked us a question who had the happiest childhood in the world and we used to reply in chorus- soviet children in our country. And the next question was whom should we thank for it and all of us knew the reply - comrade Stalin and our communist party. It was a congenital reflex.

Soon father was assigned the chief physician of the sanatorium and he was given separate house on the territory of the sanatorium. Grandmother spent a lot of time with father. The sanatorium was located in a thick coniferous forest. It was very beautiful. In 1932 father was transferred to Mytischki [Moscow suburb]. He had the same position - the chief physician and rontgenologist of the tuberculosis. When I turned 7, father gave me my first camera for my birthday. It was a small box, charged with a small glass plate. I went to develop the plate in an X-ray laboratory. I walked there with bated breath not to catch tuberculosis germs.

I learned how to read and write before going to school. Father of one of the colleagues, lived in the sanatorium, where my father worked. We spent summer time there as well. He was retired and he was eager to teach us how to write and read as well as rudiments of arithmetic. Owing to those classes I entered the second grade of Russian secondary school in the year of 1934. There were other Jewish children in my class, but no anti-Semitism was coming from children or my peers. From the very childhood we were taught that all of us were USSR citizens and people of all nationalities were equal. We truly believed in that.

Soon I was a good student, though I did not have straight excellent marks. Approximately from the 4th grade I started attending drama extracurricular class. Later on I was fond of theatre when I was a student in the institute. I was a young Octobrist [21](#), pioneer [22](#) like the rest of my classmates. I even did not admit that somebody was not willing to become a Pioneer or a Komsomol [23](#). Everybody joined, so did I. I was considered an activist, I took part in all school activities.

I remembered the repressions of the middles 1930s in the USSR not only by the arrest of Lev Drubetskiy, but also by the arrest of the husband of my mother's sister Maria. Almost every day at our classes at school we were told to paint over the portraits of the 'peoples' enemies' [24](#), including the portraits of the legendary commanders, ardent communists and militaries, whose portraits were in our textbooks. Nobody told us what was going on, neither in school nor at home. We were children and could not get how it might have happened that such famous people turned out to be peoples' enemies and act against soviet power they had been struggling for. But at the back of my mind I understood that I should not ask my teachers about it. I just painted over the portraits and kept it out of my mind. I had not the slightest doubt in the correctness of the verdicts.

There was another recollection from childhood. Father's sister Liya and her husband Andrey Fomin were old Bolsheviks [25](#), members of the communist party since 1919. Since that time they had had personal weapon- Andrey had a pistol and Liya had a browning. With the outbreak of the repressions the weapon was taken from all Bolsheviks. Probably those who were about to be arrested either shot themselves or the NKVD agents [26](#), who came over to take them. In spite of that old Bolsheviks had the permits for weapons and all of them momentarily were disarmed.

I remember how the entire school went to the cinema to watch anti-fascist movie Professor Mamlock [27](#). But I do not remember it, probably I was too small to understand that movie. I remember the event regarding the war in Spain [28](#), because for us it was not mere words. Orphan Spanish children were brought to Moscow from Spain. There was a sanatorium in front of our school and Spanish orphans were given a lodging there. They took them strolling every day and we were watching them. It was the first time we tried oranges, Spanish paid USSR for the weapon, ammunition and fuel. Those oranges were on offer in the store. Before that oranges were not sold and even now I associate oranges with the war in Spain.

When father was transferred to the sanatorium in Mytishi to work as a chief physician, he was offered to join the party. At that time any person who was taking a leading position, was supposed to be the member of the party. Being a doctor father was on the military register and periodically had to participate in military call. I remember when father was on the leave, he came back home with the saber on the side and a piston in the holster. Father tried his best to hide it from me. Father was conferred the title - doctor of the 3rd rank, that is the captain in accordance with nowadays classification.

### During the war

During Finnish Campaign [29](#) our confidence that our army was invincible was slightly shattered. We could not comprehend how small Finland had been successfully resisting for such a long time. In general, we did not know for sure what was going on, there were only rumors. Father was drafted in the Finnish war as a military doctor. Father did not tell me much about the war. They were warned not to leak information. He only mentioned that his patients were with the frostbites rather than with the gunshot wounds. Our military leaders did not even think that those who were to fight in Finland required a warmer uniform. The uniform given to the militaries was not appropriate. Father has the gloomiest impressions about the war.

In 1941 I finished 7 grades. I did not want to go on with studies at a compulsory school. I was going to enter military navy school in Moscow. It was the time when special military schools were founded- first artillery, then air force and navy. The latter was in Moscow, at Krasnoselskaya street. Parents approved of my decision. I was given my certificate in school administration and submitted my documents to the navy school. Only those students who had good and excellent marks were admitted in school. I did not go through medical examination. When I was a child I had an eardrum inflammation and my tympanic membrane was punctured. That was the reason why medical board disqualified me. The laryngologist said that I might deafen during the artillery bursts of the battle ship. I took my documents to my previous school and we went to father to Mytishi. That was the place where I used to go on holidays. On Sunday, the 22nd of June 1941 my father, sister and I had breakfast and went for a walk in the forest. Mother and grandmother did some things about the house. We came back at lunch time and mother met us with the news about the outbreak of WW2. The next day father was drafted in the army. His task was to establish a military hospital. Germans onsurge was swift and the frightened authorities decided that the hospital was to be established in Middle Asia, in the town of Almaty, Kazakhstan [3200 km to the South-East from Moscow]. Father went there to take care of the infrastructure works. I went with him. Mother, grandmother and Ella stayed in Moscow. We were sure that the war would not last long and Germans would not be allowed to approach Moscow for sure.



There was no place for us to settle in Almaty. The entire city was teeming with evacuees from those areas, where Germans came first. Enterprises, institutions, theatres, cinemas were evacuated in Almaty. Father was offered to go to Chimkent, Kazakhstan [600 km from Almaty]. He made the agreement with the local authorities regarding deployment of the military hospital in Chimkent. There we found out that Moscow was being bombed. We were thinking of my family, which stayed in Moscow. Father left me in Chimkent, and went to Moscow to take them here. Father came back with mother and sister. Grandmother died during bombing. She was buried on the Jewish cemetery, next to my elder sister Rita.

In Chimkent my sister and I went to the local school. We lived by the hospital. Mother worked in the hospital as a nurse's aide. Father was tied up at work and practically did not see him. Apart from working with patients he was involved in organizational work. We did not stay there for a long time. When Germans were squeezed out from Moscow in winter of 1941, father was ordered to transfer the hospital to Voronezh [500 km to the South-West from Moscow]. We took the victory in Moscow defense as the sign of the end of war. We loaded things in the trains, reached Voronezh and settled in there. I finished the 8th grade there. I understood that we might have stuck in Voronezh by the end of war and I decided to look into vocational studies. I was interested in aviation and like to make the mini models of the existing planes. There was a large military aircraft manufacture plant and the aircraft vocational school. In summer 1942 having finished the 8th grade I supplied the documents to the aircraft manufacture vocational school. I had good marks and was admitted to the school without taking entrance exams. My school started on the 1st of September and I was supposed to be involved in farming works during the summer time. My mother and sister went with me. We took the train. At that time Germans were attacking Stalingrad via Voronezh. When the hospital was being evacuated, father managed to find us at the train station, while we were waiting for a car heading for kolkhoz [30](#), whereto we were assigned to work. We came back. The equipment and wounded were loaded in the cars and we took the cart towards Stalingrad. We stopped in the town of Balashov, Saratov Oblast [600 km to the South-West from Moscow]. There were dug-out, most likely made by the militaries. We used them for the hospital. The wounded were taken from Stalingrad front [Stalingrad Battle] [31](#). We heard a constant clatter of bursts saw flashes from shells and mines. Soon there was a mishap with my father. He sent the car to take the medicine from the storage facilities and that car did not return. The commissar [Political officer] [32](#) informed the headquarters against father and father was arrested. He was disarmed and convoyed to the headquarters, located in Balashov. The three of us left without knowing what to do. Father was tried in the martial court and sentenced to 8 years with the adjournment of the of the execution of the sentence by the end of war. Father was sent to the front lines. Father was the commander of the hospital platoon of the medical battalion. It was not a military hospital, but a medical battalion which was in the rear troops. The doctors and nurses assisted the wounded right in the battle field or not far from it. Father reached Hungary with medical battalion. He met the victory day there. Father has military such military awards as Medal for Military Merits [33](#) and Red Star Order [34](#).

We stayed by the hospital. Father was transferred to the hamlet. Now the wounded were not in the dug-outs, but in the village houses. Mother worked as a nurse's aide and I started to work a water-carrier for the hospital. Early in the morning horse was harnessed in the cart with big barrels and I went to the river to fill those barrels up with water by using the buckets. Then I went back to the hospital and took water to the kitchen. If there was not enough water, I had to go to the river once

again in the evening, when it was dark.

Father's sister Faina took us from there. She had lived in the hamlet out of Moscow, called Tymkovo, Noginsk region. She was in charge of the seed-trial ground, where new sorts of grain were tested. Then the decision was made whether they should be cultivated in our agriculture. Via the regional party committee she made it possible to get the permit for us, the family of the front-line soldier, to come back to Moscow. We came to Moscow, but they did not let us in. We had the permit for the Noginsk district and we were accompanied by the patrol to the Kurskiy train station [There are nine main railroad stations in Moscow. The stations are named after train routes: from Yaroslavskiy train station the trains leave in Yaroslavl direction, from Belarusskiy train station in direction to Belarussia, from Kiev rail station -to Kiev etc.] and were sent to Noginsk. I entered the local school and got a passport. We lived in Faina's house. Mother managed to get the permit to come back to Moscow. She went to Moscow to the tulle and lace factory, where she worked before evacuation and the secretary of the party organization of the factory processed the invitation for my mother to come to Moscow. There was a military in our apartment, but when mother showed up, he move out. Mother and Ella left for Moscow, and I stayed in Timkovo before vacation. On the 10th of March I got the draft notification from the military enlistment office. I was turning 18 only in December, but it was the time when men were drafted by the year of birth. So men, born in 1925, were drafted in the army.

All draftees settled in the town club. We slept on the stage and on the floor. I did not finish the 9th grade but it was written in my military ID 'education - 9 grades'. Those who finished at least 9 grades were sent to Novgorod-Volyn military infantry school, evacuated in Yaroslavl. I became the cadet of the school. The school was in the former cadet corps. We lived in the barracks. We were allowed to go in the city only when were on duty on the military patrol. In the city we could go to the market and buy some food. We were clad in non-manual jackets with stand-up collars, worn pants and boots.

I went to the field squadron. We were taught to handle all kinds of weapons when the divisions when would be able to take command after graduation. First we were supposed to study for 3 months, then the term was expanded for 6 months. Our troops gained the victory in Stalingrad battle. It was a turning point in the course of war. We even were sent there to yield the harvest .We pulled flax, scythed rye in kolkhoz before we got the order to leave everything and come back to school immediately. The commander of the school got an order to send all cadets of school to the front-lines as privates. We were aligned after breakfast and were told to hand in our linen, receive new uniform and off to the front lines. On the 25th of April of 1943 we took the oath. We aligned and marched to the train station singing a song. The train station was crowded with people! We could hear women wail when the train was leaving. We got to the station Loknya, not far from Old Russa and came to the forest. There was rifle regiment 247. It was supposed to be reformed. We were assigned in the gun squad and were given personal weapon. My rifle was manufactured before the war was unleashed. It was a bayonet rifle charged with nine cartridges. We carried the bayonet behind the belt. Most soldiers were armed with the rifles of the sample of the year 1893. We used them throughout the war. We were taught how to shoot from rifles at school and here we were trained how to shoot from the gun machine Maxim, a powerful weapon of the civil war [35](#). The gun consisted of 3 parts- the main body weighting 20 kg, the heaviest part -the carrier weighing 32 kg and the third one is the shield weighing 8 kg. There was a shell around the barrel, where water



was poured for cooling. Every day we were to take our gun machines to the training area, located couple of km away from the regiment. It was possible to go there by tram, but we were not allowed to do that. We also were prohibited to carry the gun-machine on the wheels, as the latter might be spoiled on the pebble pavement. We had to carry all that stuff, moreover we had to do it swiftly in order to come back to the regiment at noon. We rolled out jackets put it on the back and part of the gun on the top of it. Apart from shooting training we also had march drilling in Staraya Russa and attacked the bounds of the hypothetical aggressor. Once we were taken to the drilling ground and were told to dig the trenches as the tanks were supposed to be there in 30 minutes. The trenches were supposed to be deep enough to lie down there otherwise people might be crushed by the tanks. The training ground was made of trampled arid clay, but we managed to make the trenches. The tanks were over us and we were supposed to throw a training grenade in the tank. It was the idea of the supreme commander that young soldiers should have drilling with tanks not to be scared off by tanks in the battle. We had a pretty rigid training. We spent night in dugs-out.

At New Year's Eve, on the 1st of January of 1944 we heard the alarm and were told to get up. We thought that it was another march drilling, but it turned out that we were sent to the front lines. The training was over. We were taken to Velikiye Luki, Pskov oblast [450 km to the West from Moscow], and marched towards Nevel. We reached the destination point in the evening, but we did not manage to have a respite. We had to dig the pits and throw straw there. It was our place to sleep. In the morning we were ordered to come back to Velikiye Luki. There was a paradise for us - the sanitary car with the bathroom. We took a bath and were given clean underwear. In the morning we were sent to participate in the battle at the station Nasva. All of us were given skis and we set out with ammunition. I was assigned to be second gun soldier and I was to carry a huge bag with the disks for the gun machine. We had been walking all day long. At night we were taken to the forest and were told to settle there over night. I was really thirsty and I drank water from some puddle. In the darkness I fumbled some sort of a log, put my head on it and feel asleep. In the morning I woke up and saw that it was not a log, but a defunct German. The puddle I drank from was in the lapel of the German's jacket.

We had been waiting for the order to attack all day long and only at time we off to attack. It was my first true battle. Frankly speaking I was scared. I wanted to cower, to become small and inconspicuous. We were attacking at night. From time to time there were flashes from the bursts of shells. Germans were firing at us from the gun-machines and mortars. We were at a run hearing the commands 'Straight forward', then 'lie down' and again 'Straight forward'. When we got up for another attack, I saw that the soldier next to me knelt and then slowly fell on the side. It was the first death I saw in the battle. Later on there were a lot of deaths, but I remembered the first one for ever.

The attacks were periodic. We attacked squeezing Germans out and then they push us to the initial positions. I was wounded in the leg during one of such attacks. I bandaged my leg with the field dressing. The nurses were not coming. One of the wounded was toddling ahead of me and said that I should move otherwise I would freeze. I stumped to the squad somehow. The medical assistant examined my wound wrote in the 'card of the leading edge' saying: «blunt bullet penetrating wound in the upper third of right hip. Bullet was assumed to penetrate in the abdomen». I spent the night in the tent of the sanitary squad and in the morning I was transferred to the sanitary point, and from there to the replacement depot and finally to the hospital. I was taken to the

replacement depot in a truck, which carried the defunct soldiers to the common grave. The corpses were half naked with frozen bodies. I was supposed to sit right on the cadavers. On the way to the replacement depot the cadavers were taken off the dug grave and the wounded were also picked up in put the truck. Replacement depot was in the devastated church. There were walls, but the dome was demolished during bombing .We had to spend a night there and wait for the goods train, remodeled to carry the wounded. We got on the train and went to the rear hospital in Valdai. I was sent to take the X-ray in order to find out the place where the bullet stayed. It turned out that the bullet went tangentially and there was no need in operation. My wound was stitched and I was transferred to the hospital of the lightly wounded. I healed up pretty swiftly and was transferred to the reserve regiment. There marching squads were formed and sent to the lines. I was sent to the reserve rifle regiment 204, to the anti-tank weapon. The latter looks like a small cannon, but it is called the gun, because its caliber is 15 mm. It is so big that person would not be able to carry it. I was conferred the rank of the junior lieutenant. When the training was over I was given travel ration and was in the lines again. We went by train somewhere and then we walked for 3 days. Finally we arrived. The officers from the regiments came over to select people. There was a captain who asked who wanted to be in reconnaissance and I said that I would like to. He looked through my documents, and took me together with two more people. We came to the separate reconnaissance squad # 87 of guards rifle division # 254. The squad even had its own banner and rear subdivisions. We positioned in the forest, then we were told to move forward to the town of Novorzheva. We settled in a hamlet. Part of the troops, positioned there went to the rear for replenishment. They were supposed to provide us with the complete reconnaissance data on the leading edge of the adversary. All squads left, but the headquarters of the regiment and the reconnoiterers, who could not leave before they had taken a captive German and receive the reconnaissance data from him. It turned out that our reconnaissance squad was not involved in anything until they left. I went reconnoitering 2-3 times and then it was calm. Since it was written in my documents that I had finished 9 grades and was well up in the maps I was sent to the squad of surveyors while our reconnaissance squad was at ease. Now it is called exploratory survey. It is conducted on the forward edge. I was given the so-called 'blind' maps. At night when German artillery was firing at our positions, we were to determine where the shooting was coming from, the caliber and the type of the cannons and the distance to the German positions. We were supposed to determine that aurally. First, I thought it was impossible, but soon I learned how to do it. We were supposed to mark the position and type of the cannons on the 'blind' map. We did not have our own telescope, so I was in the trench with the artillery reconnaissance. Artillery division had an artillery regiment, and every rifle regiment had an artillery squadron. They used artillery telescopes only during shooting and survey of the forward edge of the Germans. It is strange that during firing I was not scared for myself. The fear came later on after the battle. When Germans were shooting there was only thing I feared that Germans might hit the artillery telescope. I was focused on work and there was no place for any other emotions.

We were supplied pretty well. We did not starve. Of course, we craved for home-made food. There was a semi-demolished house on the neutral strip. There was potato in its ceiling. We boiled that potato, and baked it in the fire. It was not a mere food for us; it reminded us of our previous peaceful times.

In July 1944 there was an attack. The artillery preparation was in the outset and our reconnaissance squad was in the second car together with the headquarters of the division. We

stopped near some sort of a hamlet. Our squad was told to prepare for one of the commanders an observation point on the hill. It meant to dig full-face trench, so a person could stand there and install the set a telescope there. It was not easy as there were no tripods. We were supposed to cut a log in the forest, fasten it to the edge of the trench, and fasten the telescope to the log. It took us the whole night to do that. In the morning, when the regiment commander came over, I was sent to the forest to make sure that none of the cars passed. I was supposed to stop the cars, make the passengers get out from it and walk. In case somebody disobeyed I was to shoot on the wheels. I did not enjoy that considering that I had sleepless night. I was so weary that I physically could not walk to my dug-out and fell asleep right by the observation point. I woke up because I had a feeling that someone slapped my hand hard. It turned out that the fragment of shell pierced my arm. Shell makes a funnel and the fragments of mine are scattered on the land during the earth. The Germans noticed our observation point and opened mortar fire. I was pulled down right away. I was pulled down the trench. They bandaged my arm and when the shooting was over I went to the medical battalion. The fragment was removed, the wounded was cleaned and I was sent to the hospital in Lisino, Pskov oblast. The wounded did not heal up and was suppurating. When the X-ray was made, it turned out that petty fragments remained in the wound, so it did not heal. I was to be operated once again. The surgeon removed the fragment of shell, part of the shirt sleeve and jacket sleeve, which were pulled in the wound by the fragment of shell, and sutured my wound. Finally my wound was getting better.

I asked to discharge me from the hospital. In the end, the chief of the hospital allowed me to be discharged and treated in the medical battalion of the regiment. Our regiment re-dislocated to Latvia. I knew about that. When I was discharged from the hospital I went to the station of Autse, whereby our regiment was positioned. I was lucky to stop a truck, which carried the shells, and the drivers agreed to give me a lift in spite of the fact that he was violating the instruction not to carry passengers. I reached the place and found our regiment. I even managed to have my hair cut in the local barber shop. The reconnoiterers were not cut close to the skin like other soldiers so that they could pretend to be civilians in the event of captivity. When I came back I was supposed to come to the headquarters of the division. It turned out that the aide of the commander of headquarters on reconnaissance major Danilchenko was killed with his orderly. Our squad commander was to take his position. I reported that I came back in the lines after being recovered. I was sent to the reconnaissance squad. I regained my previous activity. I went reconnoitering. Then there was an order to send one person from the squad to attend the courses of the Komsomol organizers. They chose me for some reason, though I joined Komsomol only in 1943 in the lines. I had attended them for a month and came back to the squad with the rank of a senior sergeant. Shortly after that there was the order that the second Baltic Front was to be annulled and the military staff should be transferred to Leningrad front. The banner of our reconnaissance squad was taken to Moscow and we joined rifle guards division # 85. But is the officer's position and I was only a senior sergeant. Shortly after that when a new commander came, I became his deputy. Our task was to push the German troops from Latvia. The battles were fierce. Though, both we and Germans understood that the war was winding up. Germans still were resisting. I was involved in reconnaissance as well as in the infantry battles. When the battle was on, I could not stay aloof saying that my business was done by making reconnaissance. Germans were bringing new forces, equipment and firing points. They had a lot of defense constructions there. We were attacking. We were ordered to take the village. We had stayed in the forest overnight and in the morning we were to attack in the morning. The battle was hard. Germans hit with a constant mortar fire and we had

a lot of casualties. There were mostly wounded because of flat mines. Any way we managed to liberate the village and Germans retreated. Suddenly we were ordered to come back to initial positions. It turned out that it was not the village we were supposed to fight for. We were furious – a lot of officers were killed. Only 20 people were left from our reconnaissance squad out of 75. The squad commander was also killed in action. All those casualties were for some strategically unimportant village, just because somebody in the headquarters made a mistake. By the way, it was not the only case. The next morning, on the 14th of April 1945 I was sent in reconnaissance to find the access roads to the hill, we were supposed to fight for. I fulfilled the task and came back to the squad. The commander listened to my report, marked the attack routes on the map and told me to take people and start assault. There were hardly any people left- 15 men and 3 elderly nurses. They did not want to fight as it would be silly to be killed at the very end of war. We had to walk through the forest to get to the hillock. It was hard: there were saplings and Germans cut the trunks so that high stumps were left at a small distance from each other. It was impossible to crawl or to run. We could only walk. I was the first in the group. We did not know that a German sniper was up a tree, and the bullet hit me. I was lucky to stay alive and get just a dipnoous wound of the forearm. I was bandaged hastily and sent to the medical battalion after the battle. Soon the deputy political officer of the regiment came over and said that for that battle I would be awarded with the medal “For Bravery” [36](#). They also sent a letter to mother saying that her son was awarded with the medal “For Bravery” as well as the words of gratitude for upbringing of the worthy defender of the Motherland.

My wound was cleansed and in a week I was sent to the reserve regiment, mortar battalion. I had stayed there for a week. Half of the day I was trained, and the rest of the day I had a spare time. We were not given weapon in the reserve regiment. Only when we were on duty to guard the regiment, we were given guns. We were supposed to return them when we were off the duty. We were not used to feel helpless and disarmed and when going to bed we did not know whether we would wake up in the morning. Suddenly at night of 8/9th of May we were woken up by shooting. We were scared that the Germans came over and all of us would be shot. We got out and saw that everybody on the meadow shooting in the air. People were shooting from guns, flare pistols, gats whatever people had. Somebody who was shooting noticed out frightened faces and cried out ‘the war is over’. We even could not believe it at once. In the morning we went to our neighbors, the squad of bombers, to look around what was going on there. We saw mechanics disarm the planes, dismantling bomb-carriers and guns. Only then we finally believed that the war was over. At noon, on the 9th of May our commander congratulated us on victory and gave us vodka to drink at lunch.

I did not felt anti-Semitism in the lines. I was an only Jew in our squad, but nobody ever accentuated on that. There were Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Moldavians, Tartars among my front-line friends. We even did not remember what nationality we were. There was common enemy and common duty. There were criteria of assessment of the personal characteristics of men by you. Your life often depended on those, who were close by. Nationality was not one of those criteria.

All of us were patriots in the lines. We were brought up by the Soviet regime. Party, Lenin [37](#), Stalin were out reality. We were aware that we struggled against fascism and gained victory owing to Stalin. Of course, we were thinking that we were young and did not ponder things over. Now I understand that if there were no Stalin’s repressions, there would be no war, or in the event of war there would be much less casualties if our commanders were those militaries who were exiled and

shot in the times of Great Terror. At that time I was not prone to think that it was possible to question the actions of Stalin or the Party.

### After the war

The war was over and I had to think what to do next. There was an order – if somebody had some sort of military education should be sent to military schools. So I was sent to attend front-line courses for junior lieutenants of Leningrad front. In summer we were sent to cut wood. When we came back the commander of the school said that army did not need junior lieutenants and we would be distributed to the military schools of the city of Leningrad and Leningrad command. We were taken to Leningrad to the 1st Leningrad Red Banner Infantry School. We were supposed to take entrance exams – Russian language and Mathematics. Of course, I forgot mathematics, but my Russian was not bad. I was admitted to school. I was to start school on the 1st of September and we were sent to the camps. As a rule we had march drilling and got ready for the parade. Then military parade was cancelled in Leningrad. There was a victory parade in Moscow. In Leningrad sports parade was held at Dvortsovaya (Palace) square. We, dressed in white shorts and T-shirts, were doing PT exercises. After parade our platoon stayed in Leningrad. We were not let in the city since we were not properly dressed. Time went by. September was coming and I had to start school. In late October they read us the order of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR [38](#) as of 25th October saying that doctors, teachers, engineers and militaries, who had over 3 battle injuries were to be demobilized from the army. I was classified for demobilization. The commander of military school called me and asked whether I wanted to go on with my studies. I requested demobilization and on the 17th of November I was demobilized. I received the traveling documents and came back to Moscow.

Father came back from the army couple of days before I came. The sentence which was adjourned by the end of war, was cancelled by the martial court of Privolzhie command. So, father was a free man. He was immediately offered a job in the tuberculosis hospital in a small town out of Moscow, Zvenigorod. He was the deputy chief physician. Sister studied at school, mother was a housewife. First of all, I was to finish the 10th grade. There were institutions of external studies, where the demobilized from the army were prepared within three month to get the secondary education certificate. I enrolled for external studies and finished the course. We were not entitled to take final exams at the external studies institution, we were assigned to a school where we could do that. I passed the exams and got the certificate. My school friend studied at Technical Institute (former ammunition institute, and nowadays it is called Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute). The name of the school was changed, but the profile remained unchanged- weapon production. There were three departments: technological, design and physics. She talked me into entering that institute, the design faculty. The participants of war were admitted beyond the competition. I was supposed only to have the interview in mathematics. I was not admitted to the design department and I was offered to study at technological department of that institute. On the 1st of September 1946 I started school. I became an engineer- metallurgist. I had worked in that field until retirement.

I did not rank among the top students, but I was not a poor student either. Apart from studies I also was enrolled in a drama circle. In 1948 cosmopolite processes started. At that time anti-Semitism was rather conspicuous. Jewish students were expelled from the institute, and Jewish teachers were fired. There were incessant articles about cosmopolites- the activists of science or culture. Jews



were baited, but fortunately our institute was untouched. There were a lot of Jews, both teachers and students, but none of them suffered. The only time we felt anti-Semitism was shortly before defending of diplomas. During the last term more than a half of our group was transferred to the physics department. There were a lot of atom physics scientists, but there were few designers. None of the transferred was a Jew. Only Russians were chosen. They envied us and if their job was very hazardous, not of them lived over 50 years.

I defended my diploma successfully. Nobody was given a mandatory job assignment in Moscow. I was lucky to be the third and I chose Saratov [800 km from Moscow]. Most of the assignments were in Ural and Kazakhstan.

I came to Saratov. It was an appliance building plant, evacuated to Saratov from Leningrad during the war. It remained there after war. Navigation gauges were produced there for the navy. I was assigned a foreman in the thermal department of the instrumental workshop, as it was the only shop, where the parts requiring thermal processing, were produced. They treated me pretty well at the plant. In a year I was assigned the chief foreman. I lived in the plant hostel for engineers. It was a recently constructed log house. Married people were given separate room. I lived in one room with three engineers, who came to the plant as per mandatory job assignment.

Shortly after my arrival in Saratov, I was elected in Komsomol Committee of the plant [Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities]. Then I was offered to join the party. At that time party membership was very important for career, therefore I did not object. I received the recommendation of the district Komsomol committee as well as recommendations from other party members. The general meeting of the communist party members of the plant approved my candidacy, but the plant party committee did not approve me. I tried to find out what was going on, but there was no answer. I stopped looking for a response.

It was harder for me to work when I was promoted in my position. People who had worked longer than me bore grudge and started convincing the director that there was no need in chief foreman in the workshop. My position was reduced, and the position of a foreman had been already taken. I was supposed to work for three years as per mandatory job assignment, but I remained jobless. I had no right to quit job and the director was not entitled to fire me. They suggested that I should write a letter to the ministry asking to assist me. Father had some acquaintances who worked for the ministry of the armament and soon I received a letter from the ministry, where it was indicated that they did not mind my leaving the job at the plant. In 1953 I came back to Moscow.

I was in Saratov when Stalin died in 1953. I was really grieving. I was raised with Stalin's name; he was almost like a God to me. We went to festive demonstrations just to look at the members of the government and Stalin, who stood on mausoleum. There was no TV at that time. Everybody knew that Stalin was present at the demonstrations by 1 p.m., so people tried to get there by that time. I burst into tears when I found out about Stalin's death. I felt a terrible loss. I could not even imagine how I would live without him.

In some time after Stalin's death there was tittle-tattle that repressions were unfair. Though, nobody associated Stalin with repressions, but Beriya [39](#). First, everybody was confounded when Khrushchev [40](#) denounced Stalin's crimes at XX Party congress [41](#). First Khrushchev's speech was secretive and it was read only at the closed party meetings. I found out about cruel things. Then



rehabilitations commenced [42](#). There were a lot of the repressed who did not survive. Of course, exoneration meant a lot for the kin, but it was impossible to resurrect those who were killed ...

I thought that after XX party congress anti-Semitism would merely vanish as the term 'peoples' enemy'. But my expectations were not met, when I came back to Moscow from Saratov and started looking for a job. I read all job openings, went for the interviews, but could not find a job. I was told by the HR department that I was the right person, but as soon as they read my form, wherein there was a notorious «5th line» [43](#) - nationality, it turned out that the position was taken. Of course, I understood that it was a pretext, but there was nothing doing about it.

Once when I was on the brink of despair, I passed by one-storied building and saw the announcement on job opening of the engineer- heat-treated. Now the institute is called Central Institute of Machine Building, at that time it was Scientific Research Institute of Defense Industry. I came to the HR department without any hope and said that I would like to work there. I had the documents on me. In spite of my expectations the head of HR department asked the director of the department to come in. A typical Jew, whose last name was Regeler. He looked at my diploma and told me that I could start the next day. It turned out that not only in my department, but the entire institute was full of Jews. There were more Jews than Russians. That year I was admitted in the party. I had worked in the institute for 13 years. Then in 1966 the elderly retired and the management changed, so I had to come across anti-Semitism once again. Without any grounds I was transferred from the position of the leading engineer to the position of the chief engineer. It was a lower position and much lower salary. I decided to change my job. I was known as an expert and had quite a few publications. I addressed to one of the institute and filled in the form there, but I was not scheduled the interview. Finally, my acquaintance, director of the department at the Institute of Steel and Alloys, also by the ministry of defense industry, offered me a job there but with a lower salary. I agreed to it. Gradually I got a pay rise and my salary was even higher than at a previous job.

I met my future wife when I worked at the institute of defense industry. Tatiana Shamrai got a mandatory job assignment after graduation from Higher Technical School named after Bauman, the so-called Bauman institute [Moscow High Technical School named after renowned revolutionary Nikolay Bauman, today it is called Technical Institute] to work as appliances designer. Tatiana is Russian. She was born in the village of Starinki, Kaluga oblast [250 km from Moscow] in 1931. Her father Mikhail Shamrai was a farmer and mother Praskovia Shamrai was a housewife, and also helped her husband with the field work. There were five children in the family. The eldest son was Peter. There were also Ivan and daughters Anna and Maria, born in 1926. Tatiana was the youngest one. With the outset of collectivization [44](#) the family moved to Moscow. Father worked as a janitor and mother worked at Caoutchouc plant in the most hazardous plant- where degreasing of metallic constructions in cyanic solutions took place. It was a hard living, but two daughters Anna and Tatiana got higher education. Tatiana was really gifted. She, a village girl, finished school with gold medal [Editor's note: the golden medal was the highest distinction in USSR secondary schools. A student was supposed to have straight excellent marks (100%) to get the golden medal. A student was supposed to have 90% of excellent marks to get silver medal. ], entered the institute named after Bauman and brilliantly graduated from it. She was loved by everybody at work. When we met, soon I understood that she was the one for me: a clever and healthy village girl. We got married in 1961. My parents were not against that my wife was Russian. Nationality was not important for

them. We had a common wedding: got registered in the state registration office and in the evening our friends came over to mark the event. I moved in Tatiana's place. She had a small room in the communal apartment. Her siblings were married off and lived separately. Tatiana's father died, and her mother lived with her elder sister Anna. By the way, Anna was also married to a Jew, my friend Vladimir Tarskiy. In 1962 our son Pavel was born. Tatiana's sister Maria was not married, but she gave birth to a son in 1960. Maria died from cancer and her son was raised in our family. When Pavel turned 3, we got a separate 2-room apartment.

When I left the institute Tatiana had worked there for several years. Then she changed her job and went to work for the Institute of Current Sources as engineer- designer of solar batteries. Tatiana managed to become a good expert and she was appreciated at work. The leading expert of the institute was a well-know scientist Korolev [45](#), who liked Tatiana and took her opinion into account.

In the 1970s mass immigration to Israel started. I was not going to leave USSR. I did not know neither the language nor the customs and traditions. I was not religious either. I did not think it would be better for me in Israel than here. I did not judge those who were leaving and I tried to support them.

We marked all soviet holidays at work. It was mandatory to attend the demonstrations on the 1st of May and 7th of November. First people got days off for participation in demonstrations and people were willing to go there. Then it was cancelled and people were made to attend demonstrations. Each department was told how many people should be present and people were responsible for the presence of the representatives of the department on the demonstration. We had a feast at work after demonstration, and a concert afterwards. On Victory day [46](#) veterans were honored. It was the only day throughout a year when I put my awards on. At home we also marked holidays, but apart from New Year's day and victory day, they were just ordinary days-off when we could invite guests over and have fun.

Having finished school my son entered Bauman institute, the Technological -Physical Metallurgy department. After graduation he worked in one of the machine building design institutes in Moscow. After perestroika [47](#), which brought unemployment, Pavel got a new specialty -a programmer. Since that time he had worked for a firm as a programmer. Son married a Russian girl, Alexander Gonchrova. They are a good family. They have two children. The elder Elizaveta was born in 1995, and son Nikolvay - in 1997. We keep in touch. My son and his family come over to us. Unfortunately it takes them more than 2 hours to get to us, that is why we do not see each as often as we wished.

My sister entered Moscow Geologic Exploration Institute, Mineral Waters Faculty. Geology is not a proper profession for a woman, it is rather hard, but Ella liked it. She was involved in exploration of mineral waters and was the head of exploration department in balneology institute. She was on multiple expeditions. Ella was married to her fellow student, Russian guy Yuri Romanov, when they were in the graduate year. In 1954their son Alexander was born and in 1960 son Mikhail. Unfortunately, the elder son was a sick man and was afflicted with epilepsy since childhood. He finished the music school, violin department, but he could not work. He lived with the parents and got the dole for the disabled. The younger went to work at the plant after the army, got married. Now he has two children. He works in advertisement business.

Parents lived by themselves. They were dependable. Ella exchanged her apartment for a bigger one in late 1970s. They settled in Biryulevo, the outskirts of Moscow. It was very far from our previous place. Probably they should not move. Mother died in 1980, and father died in a half a year. We buried them on the common cemetery. The funeral was secular as none of the parents was religious.

When Mikhail Gorbachev [48](#) declared about perestroika, I took it with enthusiasm. There were new opportunities and rights that we were deprived of previously during the soviet regime. Now there was liberty of meetings, liberty of word and publications. There was no more struggle against religion [49](#), which was so rigid during soviet regime. Censorship of press was abolished. We had the chance to get the true coverage of the events in our country not from the western radio stations, but also from soviet news-paper and TV news. We learned many new things about Stalin's times. Anti-Semitism was waning. All kinds of Jewish communities were emerging. The word 'Jew' was pronounced openly, not surreptitiously. There was no iron curtain [50](#), having severed us from the rest of the world. We got the opportunity to go abroad and invite foreigners over. There was no need in concealing that we had relatives abroad. All those new things made us happy. Then gradually things calmed down and perestroika was in the crescent. At one of the party congress during the reign of Gorbachev there was an amendment in the party statute regarding the voluntary exit from the party. Things were topsy-turvy in the party at that time. District committees were not doing their work with the primary organization. Previously there were plans and political classes. After that, sessions all activities stopped. Party activists minded only their own business. Our secretary of party organization found a job at some firm. After that I wrote a letter saying that the leaders were not managing things, there was no understanding what to do, what was the general course of the party. That is why I think that there was no use for me to stay in the party. So I left the party. Then, after breakup of the USSR [1991], there were many people who left the party.

I think the breakup of the Soviet Union to be a mistake. Before that all republics were together and productions were interconnected. Such integration was very propitious for the economy. And now things are in the wane, when each of the republics is independent. Besides, the newly founded states lack qualified personnel- engineers and scientists. They do not have their own and have to invite the experts from abroad. Things created with the combined efforts are now pulled by new states. New Russia built a lot in other republics, and now it is bereft of its property. Besides human relationships are affected as well as they are now living in different countries. It is hard to come to Baltic countries, Ukraine, where friends are living. I think USSR could have been reorganized to remain a big and powerful country, the way it has always been during the soviet regime.

I retired on the 1st of January 1992. I did not want to resume work. I was on business trips so many times that I just wanted to stay home with my wife. We went for a walk, attended cinema and theatres, discusses the books we read. We did not have time for that before. I do not take part in the social Jewish communities. When I was a school student, I was involved in social work even in extracurricular time. Now, I want peace. In April 2004 my wife died. I remained by myself. Of course I want somebody to talk to and there are my friends and kin for that.

## [Glossary](#)

### [1](#) **Khrushchovka**

Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in the new neighborhood of most Soviet cities.

## **2 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

## **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 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 World War I, 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.

## **5 Five percent quota**

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

## **6 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments

continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **7 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dniestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

## **8 Moldova**

Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River and the Black Sea, also a contemporary state, bordering with Romania and Ukraine. Moldova was first mentioned after the end of the Mongol invasion in 14th century scripts as Eastern marquisate of the Hungarian Kingdom. For a long time, the Principality of Moldova was tributary of either Poland or Hungary until the Ottoman Empire took possession of it in 1512. The Sultans ruled Moldova indirectly by appointing the Prince of Moldova to govern the vassal principality. These were Moldovan boyars until the early 18th century and Greek (Phanariot) ones after. In 1812 Tsar Alexander I occupied the eastern part of Moldova (between the Prut and the Dniester river and the Black Sea) and attached it to its Empire under the name of Bessarabia. In 1859 the remaining part of Moldova merged with Wallachia. In 1862 the new country was called Romania, which was finally internationally recognized at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Bessarabia united with Romania after World War I, and was recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic gained independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is now called Moldovan Republic (Republica Moldova).

## **9 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

## **10 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.

## **11 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 heders in 19 prayer houses.

## **12 St**

George Cross: Established in Russia in 1769 for distinguished military merits of officers and generals, and, from 1807, of soldiers and corporals. Until 1913 it was officially referred to as Distinction Military Order, from 1913 as St. George Cross. Servicemen awarded with St. George Crosses of all four degrees were called St. George Cavaliers.

## **13 NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **14 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.

## **15 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

## **16 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**



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

## **17 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.

## **18 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.

## **19 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

## **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 Young Octobrist**

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

## **22 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the

US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

### **23 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.

### **24 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

### **25 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16 April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

### **26 NKVD**

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

### **27 Professor Mamlock**

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf - a friend of Bertolt Brecht - from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy

and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

### **28 Spanish Civil War (1936-39)**

A civil war in Spain, which lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, between rebels known as Nacionales and the Spanish Republican government and its supporters. The leftist government of the Spanish Republic was besieged by nationalist forces headed by General Franco, who was backed by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Though it had Spanish nationalist ideals as the central cause, the war was closely watched around the world mainly as the first major military contest between left-wing forces and the increasingly powerful and heavily armed fascists. The number of people killed in the war has been long disputed ranging between 500,000 and a million.

### **29 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

### **30 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.

### **31 Stalingrad Battle (17 July 1942- 2 February 1943) The Stalingrad, South-Western and Donskoy Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad**

On 19-20 November 1942 the soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330 thousand people) in the vicinity of Stalingrad. The Soviet troops eliminated this German grouping. On 31 January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91 thousand people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

### **32 Political officer**

These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a

colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

### **33 Medal for Military Merits**

awarded after 17th October 1938 to soldiers of the Soviet army, navy and frontier guard for their 'bravery in battles with the enemies of the Soviet Union' and 'defense of the immunity of the state borders' and 'struggle with diversionists, spies and other enemies of the people'.

### **34 Order of the Red Star**

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

### **35 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

### **36 Medal for Valor**

established on 17th October 1938, it was awarded for 'personal courage and valor in the defense of the Motherland and the execution of military duty involving a risk to life'. The award consists of a 38mm silver medal with the inscription 'For Valor' in the center and 'USSR' at the bottom in red enamel. The inscription is separated by the image of a Soviet battle tank. At the top of the award are three Soviet fighter planes. The medal suspends from a gray pentagonal ribbon with a 2mm blue strip on each edge. It has been awarded over 4,500,000 times.

### **37 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.

### **38 The Supreme Soviet**

'Verhovniy Soviet', comprised the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union and the only one with the power to pass constitutional amendments. It elected the Presidium, formed the Supreme

Court, and appointed the Procurator General of the USSR. It was made up of two chambers, each with equal legislative powers, with members elected for five-year terms: the Soviet of the Union, elected on the basis of population with one deputy for every 300,000 people in the Soviet federation, the Soviet of Nationalities, supposed to represent the ethnic populations, with members elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each of the 15 republic of the union, 11 from each autonomous republic, five from each autonomous region, and one from each autonomous area.

### **39 Beriya, L**

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

### **40 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.

### **41 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.

### **42 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

### **43 Item 5**

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

### **44 Collectivization in the USSR**

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly

reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

#### **45 Korolyov, Sergey Pavlovich (1907-1966)**

Soviet designer of guided missiles, rockets, and spacecraft. Korolyov was educated at the Odessa Building Trades School, the Kiev Polytechnic Institute, and the Moscow Higher Technical School. During World War II he was held under technical arrest but spent the years designing and testing liquid-fuel rocket boosters for military aircraft. Essentially apolitical, he did not join the Communist Party until after Stalin's death in 1953. He was the guiding genius behind the Soviet space-flight program until his death, and he was buried in the Kremlin wall on Red Square. In accordance with the Soviet government's space policies, his identity and role in his nation's space program were not publicly revealed until after his death.

#### **46 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

#### **47 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts 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 democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

#### **48 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

#### **49 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.



## **50 Iron Curtain**

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.