

# Maria Koblik-Zeltser

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Kishinev

Moldova

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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*Maria Koblik-Zeltser is a young-looking woman with long auburn hair dressed in light pants and a sweater. She looks much younger than her age. There are a lot of books and pictures in the apartment. These were given to her husband, a great scientist. She lives in a cozy apartment in a shady street in Kishinev [Chisinau in Moldova]. Maria is brisk and agile. She easily hops on the stool and takes the books and photographs from the top shelves of a bookcase. The first time we met we were looking through albums and photographs, paper clips from medical journals, where her husband's works were published. During the first day of the interview Maria was somehow embarrassed when the dictaphone was on and felt ill at ease. But later she paid no attention to it anymore, being deeply immersed in her recollections.*

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## **My family background**

When I go back to my childhood, the first thing I remember is the town Rezina [80 km from Kishinev], where I was born and where my relatives spent their childhood. Sometimes, I think that it is the most beautiful place in the universe. I must be nostalgic about my childhood. At the beginning of the 20th century Rezina was a little town with a predominantly Jewish population [in 1897 there were 3,182 Jews (85 percent of the total population)]. The town stands on a picturesque place of the steep bend of the river Dniestr. As far as I remember, the town of the 1930s consisted of three long streets, running perpendicular to the river. Almost all the stores belonged to Jews. Unfortunately, I don't remember the names of the owners. I only remember that one of the cafes was owned by my mother's friend Madam Stekolshchik, and one of the stores belonged to Mr. Milstein, my classmate's father.

The market was on Podgornaya Street. It was open for several days a week. Moldovans from the adjacent villages used to come to the market on carts to sell their produce - meat, chicken, grapes and other fruits, vegetables - and to buy the goods they needed - certain groceries, knick-knacks, fabric and dirt cheap souvenirs for children. A large Orthodox church, surrounded by an orchard was located on the square of this street. The bell toll was heard all over the town. There was only

one church and there were several synagogues. The first and the largest synagogue was called 'Itsik and Monek.' They say it was built by the Jew Monek and his son Itsik. It was a large two-storied synagogue attended by wealthy Jews: entrepreneurs, merchants and intelligentsia – doctors and lawyers. There was also the synagogue of the tailors [synagogue maintained by the tailors' guild union] and the synagogue called 'Old and New Synagogue.' The synagogue was called this because it was a very old building, restored, remodeled and considerably expanded in the late 19th century.

I didn't know my paternal grandfather. All I know is that his name was Leibl Kozhushnyan, and he was born in the 1840s in Bessarabia [1](#). I don't know exactly where he was born. The origin of my paternal grandfather's name is unknown. Such surnames don't indicate nationality, but rather craft or the place of origin. In Bessarabia there was the hamlet of Kozhushki, not far from Rezina. The roots of our family are probably from there. I know that Grandfather's first wife died at a young age, and Grandfather had a son from the first marriage, who lived in the town of Orhei [about 40 km from Kishinev]. I have never seen him. I don't remember his name either. Grandfather Leibl got married for a second time. His wife was his age. She was born in Kishinev. My grandmother Charna was born in 1847. I don't remember her maiden name.

Grandfather Leibl was involved in commerce like most of the Jews in Rezina. [Editor's note: in Rezina a considerable part of the Jewish population engaged in viticulture and tobacco production. In 1925, 200 Jewish families cultivated an area of 1,567 hectares, 1,400 of which were rented.] I don't know exactly what he did for a living. Grandfather died at the beginning of the 20th century. I know for sure that Grandfather wasn't alive when the first child of my parents was born in 1909, because my elder brother was named after our grandfather [one of the most common practices is to name a child to honor a relative. Sephardi Jews name their children freely after both living and deceased relatives. However, Ashkenazim rarely name children after living relatives].

Charna and Leibl had four children. My father was the eldest. Then in two or three years two sisters were born: Menya and Riva. Froim was the youngest. Aunt Menya and her husband Leizer Zhovnar lived in the village of Sarateny [about 45 km from Kishinev], not far from Orhei. Leizer owned a lot of land. He was involved in tobacco production. He worked in the field from morning till night all year round. He didn't hire workers full time, only in winter time he hired a couple of workers for processing of tobacco. Their little family was rather well-off. Menya didn't have children and she was suffering because of that.

Menya loved us, her nephews and nieces, very much. She really adored us. She invited us to visit her during summer time and gave us all kinds of presents. She also treated her husband's nephews very well. Her husband had a lot of brothers, who lived in Sarateny and adjacent hamlets. Leizer even adopted a younger daughter of his sister, who was indigent. His step-daughter's name was Haikele. Menya and Leizer loved her like their own flesh and blood. In 1941, when World War II broke out [2](#), Menya and Leizer didn't manage to get evacuated. They gave their cart to Haikele and her mother. The girl wasn't able to come back to take her stepparents as the occupiers had already come to the village. Haikele couldn't forgive herself for their death. She thought till the last minute of her life that it was her fault that Menya and Leizer hadn't been evacuated.

Father's second sister Riva lived in Orhei with her husband. I only remember that his surname was Sharf. Riva had five children. The eldest son, Lev, and the youngest, Sholik, became pharmacists.

The middle son Abram was a driver. Riva's daughters Zina and Rosa were married to rather well-off Jews. Zina graduated from the Bucharest University [today Romania], from the Economics department. She lived with her husband in Bucharest. She worked as an economist for large companies. When the Soviet regime came to power in 1940 [3](#), Zina with her family moved to Kishinev. Riva died in the middle of the 1960s and all her children with the exception of Zina left for Israel in the 1980s. Zina and her husband came back to Bucharest after World War II. She lived there for a long time and recently died at the age of 85.

My father's younger brother Froim, born at the end of the 1890s, was drafted into the Tsarist army [in this period Bessarabia was part of the Russian Empire] during World War I and perished in 1916.

My father, Yankel Kozhushnyan, was born in 1880 in Rezina. Father got only elementary Jewish education at cheder, which was traditional for Jewish families. Nevertheless Father was good at writing in Russian and Romanian. He read a lot of Pushkin's [4](#) works and cited them. Father was well up in book-keeping, trade and commerce. Father became a grown-up rather early. When Grandfather died, he became the head and the bread-winner of the family of three women: grandmother and his two younger sisters. Father began to work at a young age. He was an assistant to a salesman and gradually he became a salesman in a large store, owned by a wealthy Jew. Father was a very honest man and the owner of the store totally trusted him. Father learnt a lot from him and began making pretty good money.

Father was very popular with Rezina's potential brides as he was a modern, young, well-dressed man and a good dancer. When Father decided that it was time for him to get married, he was introduced to my mother by match-makers. Father came to meet my mother in the town of Soroca [about 150 km from Kishinev], where my mother lived. He enchanted her and all relatives and left... He came back in a year and without explaining anything proposed to my mother. It didn't take her long to say yes. Then Father used to say that he fell in love with my mother at first sight, and it was unexpected to him, but he felt responsible for his younger siblings and left home to tackle things at home and earn some money for the wedding. He planned to come back to my mother.

I didn't know my maternal grandparents either. They died before I was born. My grandfather Nahman Gitelmaier was born in the 1850s in the town of Soroca. Grandfather was much older than grandmother Menihe. I don't know Grandmother's maiden name. I know that she died of cancer at the age of 54, leaving four children behind. Grandfather was a literate man, he worked as a clerk. He didn't have his own business. Grandfather Nahman didn't live a very long life, though he managed to marry off his daughters and sons. He died in 1916. Grandfather had been working from morning till night, trying to earn a living for his children. He tried to educate his children as he was literate and educated himself.

The first child born by Menihe died an infant in the 1880s. After that Grandmother didn't have children for many years. When she was on the verge of leaving for Kharkov [today Ukraine, about 450 km east of Kiev] in 1886, where Grandfather was doing his army service, her neighbors wished her to bring back two children, according to a family legend. Our family always remembered that wish of our neighbors with a smile. Their good wish was realized. In 1887 Grandmother gave birth to twins in Kharkov. The twins were my mother Soibel and her brother Aron. In a year or two a girl, Tuba, was born, then a boy Motle followed his sister. When Grandmother died Mother became the

head of the family, though she was only fourteen. She was a real homemaker: cooked food, washed linen, cleaned, helped Grandfather raise his younger children. I don't know whether Mother got some education. I think she finished a couple of classes in the lyceum [high school]. Mother was very literate: she could read and write in Russian and Romanian. She was an erudite. Besides, Mother was very strong-willed. She was actually the head of the family. She had the last word in decisions made by her siblings and later on my father didn't take any actions, even connected with his work, without having a word with my mother.

My mother's family was very religious. After Grandmother's death my mother, being the head of the family, made sure that the rites and traditions were observed. She prepared the house for Sabbath by herself. Sabbath candles were lit by her. My mother told me that once on Sabbath when she was reading a prayer the curtains caught fire from the candles. Mother was at a loss. She couldn't interrupt the prayer. Then she started to cry out the words of the prayer, in order to draw attention to herself, for people to see the fire.

Her eldest brother Aron also had another name. He was very feeble and ill in childhood and the rabbi advised to give him another name of Bukka [a protecting name]. He was called Bukka all the time, though it was written Aron in his documents. Aron finished elementary school. Then he went to the lyceum for a couple of years. He became a rather prosperous entrepreneur, though I don't remember what kind of business he had. He had a wife, Surke, and children. They lived in Soroca. Aron had a large house. There was a club and summer movie house in his yard. All that property belonged to him. He was a patron of the arts. Jewish theater troupes, which came on tour, staged performances in his club. The performances were free of charge. There was no theater troupe in the town.

Aron had four children: the eldest Revekka, the sons Mikhail and Modik and the youngest, Menihe. By the way, all of my mother's siblings had a daughter named after Grandmother Menihe. Revekka studied for a couple of years in the medical institute in Iasi, but she stopped studying when she got married. Her husband was a pharmacist. She had two sons, whose names I don't remember. Revekka died at the age of 80 in Israel. It happened a couple of years ago. Mikhail, who had graduated from the institute – I don't know exactly, I think it was a technical institution in Bucharest – was in the front lines during World War II. Then he lived in Chernivtsy [today Ukraine, about 430 km west of Kiev]. Mikhail was married, but he didn't have children. He also immigrated to Israel. He died recently. Modik, who was my age, died at the front in 1944. He is buried in a mass grave somewhere in Czechoslovakia. Menihe went there a couple of times. Menihe is not alive either. Aron died in Kishinev in the middle of the 1960s.

Mother's sister Tuba and her husband Boris Baletnik lived in the Ukrainian city of Pervomaysk Mykolayiv oblast [about 330 km south of Kiev]. Both of them worked in the bar at the station. They had a very modest living. Tuba had four children; I remember the names of three of them –Menihe, Nahman, who died at a young age, and Mikhail, who died in the lines in the 1940s. Having returned from evacuation Tuba, her husband and daughter settled in Soroca. She died in the 1960s, shortly after Uncle Aron.

The youngest in the family, Motle, born at the end of the 1890s, worked for a publishing house after finishing elementary school and vocational school. He had a significant position by the beginning of World War II. He was the director of the publishing house in Soroca. Motle had a wife,

Fradya, and three daughters: the eldest Haya, middle Zoya and the youngest called Maria [5](#). When she was born she was given the name of Menihe. All of them were in evacuation and came back to Soroca after World War II. Uncle Motle died in Kishinev in the 1980s. His daughters passed away as well. My namesake Maria was the closest to me. She also became a doctor. She died in Israel two years ago.

My parents had their wedding in Soroca under a chuppah in accordance with the Jewish rite. They settled in Rezina. Some time later my father opened a drapery store. My parents used to live in rented apartments, changing them every couple of years. The first room of their apartment was always used as a store. In December 1909 Mother gave birth to her first child. The boy was named Leibl after our grandfather. Mother didn't have children for a couple of years, and then two sons were born, with the difference of one year. Abram was born in 1913 and Velvl in 1914. I don't know about the life of my family in that period of time. Fortunately, Father wasn't drafted into the army when World War I started. First, he was the bread-winner of the family with three children and besides he was to take care of his mother Charna. Grandmother Charna lived in Rezina, but not with our family. Father rented a room for her.

In 1918 when the entire Bessarabia, including Rezina was annexed to Romania [6](#), our family was not much affected by that. Father kept working in the store. He coped with work by himself. He had no assistants. We had a rather modest living. My parents thought that it was the most important thing for their sons to be educated. All of them went to a Romanian lyceum in Rezina. When the youngest was twelve, mother unexpectedly got pregnant. First, she was at a loss. She didn't know what to do as she was about forty, but the wish to have a daughter was stronger. On 9th December 1926 she understood from her previous experience that she was having labor pains and sent her eldest son Leibl to bring a midwife. Mrs. Paromshchik was the midwife in our town. While the son was thinking where to go, parturition began. That was the way I, the youngest in the family, was born on 9th December 1926. My parents were happy. They had dreamt of having a daughter. In accordance with the tradition in my mother's family I was named Menihe after my maternal grandmother. However, later on when I was getting my official documents I changed my name to the Russian Maria, as it was more euphonic.

I had a wonderful childhood. My mother was deeply immersed in looking after me and taking care of the house. Father loved me very much as well. In spite of the fact that there were four children in the family, I was raised as an only child, because my siblings were much older than I was. They were interested in other things, but it didn't mean that they didn't care for me. They treated me very well, even pampering me sometimes. I didn't see them very often. When I got a little older they left Rezina to continue their education.

## Growing up

One of the things that I remember from my childhood is saying goodbye to my eldest brother. In 1929 he finished lyceum and ranked top among the students, having an exceptional talent in humanities - philosophy and history. Leibl wanted to go on with his education, but he understood that our father wouldn't be able to pay for it, as there were two more people in the family who needed to go to lyceum, and besides my mother and I were to be taken care of as well. Leibl and three of his friends decided to go to Belgium to enter a university there. Father gave him money only for the trip. My brother wasn't hurt as he understood that Father did all he could.

The four friends came to the town of Liege. Leibl entered the Pharmaceutical Department at the University. His friends also became students. They lived together in a rented apartment. One Jew from Bessarabia found a job for them. They were lodging in turns at the electric station. Leibl managed to graduate from the institute and began to work. I remember how my parents rejoiced when he sent them his first salary. By that time Abram had graduated from the lyceum and entered Iasi University [7](#), the Law Department. The youngest son, Velvl, studied in the lyceum in Soroca. Mother's brother Aron took Velvl to him. Having finished lyceum Velvl entered the Medical Department of Bucharest University. Father had to support two students.

We always lived in a rented apartment. To have our own house still remained a cherished and unrealizable dream for us. Mother spent almost all her time with me. We went shopping together - to the stores and to the market. We enjoyed taking pictures rather often - sometimes the three of us, sometimes the whole family was in the pictures. There were two photography shops. One of them belonged to Golovanevskiy, and the other one belonged to Zilberman. Our family preferred having pictures taken at Golovanevskiy's. They often took my pictures free of charge and placed them in the window case. They said I was a very pretty child. We took pictures to send them to Leibl in Belgium. He was missing us very much and he couldn't afford to come home for a visit.

Our family observed Jewish traditions. Father usually wore a cap or a hat; he covered his head with a kippah only while praying. Mother didn't wear a wig. She covered her head with a kerchief only when she went to the synagogue, and Father wore tallit and tefillin only when he went to the synagogue. Mother stuck to kosher principles in cooking. There were specially marked dishes for cooking dairy and meat, as well as hardware and cutting boards.

Sabbath was a holiday for me when I was a child. On Friday Mother bought a chicken and went to the shochet to have it slaughtered. We also bought fish brought from Kishinev. We bought Sabbath challah in the bakery. Besides, Mother baked her own sweet challah. Not every Jewish family could afford fancy challah made of the premium flour. The dishes cooked for Sabbath were kept in the oven. On Sabbath my parents went to the synagogue. Both of them had their own seats in the large two-storied synagogue, which was the most beautiful one in Rezina. On Saturdays my father's store was closed. When my parents came back from the synagogue Mother took the warm dinner from the oven and we had a meal.

Rosh Hashanah is the first holiday in the Jewish year. It is very ceremonious. Mother laid the table with the best dishes cooked by her. Gefilte fish [filled fish balls] was one of them. Father enjoyed it the most, saying that it was the tastiest dish. We could hear shofar sounds from the synagogues, and that sound of a trumpet seemed pristine to me and made me think about Palestine, the Jews and their history.

I remember fasting at Yom Kippur. I began fasting early, since eight. [Editor's note: Usually children under the age of nine don't fast, then they start fasting little by little. Boys start to fast as long as adults do by the age of thirteen, girls from twelve.] It was my initiative. We had a lavish dinner on the eve of the fasting day. On the fasting day parents didn't eat nor drink for the whole day. They usually spent this day in the synagogue, praying. Sometimes Mother came home for a couple of hours to take a rest. In the evening Mother laid a table either at home or in the café of her friend where our families got together. It was hard for me to fast. The hardest thing was being thirsty. Once, Mother fainted because of hunger, when she wasn't very young anymore and ill.

We usually went to my uncle to celebrate Sukkot. He had his own house, where he made the sukkah. Grape vines were hanging down from the roof of the balcony and reached the table where we had dinner during the holiday. The next holiday of Simchat Torah was very mirthful, making young and elder people agile. [Simchat Torah ('Rejoicing in the Torah') celebrates the receiving of the Torah by dancing and singing. Drinking is also common during this time.] I remember how the Torah scroll was carried along our streets and followed by the dancing religious Jews. On Chanukkah my mother and I often went to her siblings in Soroca. They gave me very generous presents and Chanukkah money [Chanukkah gelt]. I felt at home in the house of Aron and Motle.

I also liked the Purim holiday a lot. There was a nice impromptu carnival procession in the street. I knew the story of Esther since early childhood. Father told me about Esther, who saved the Jews. Mother made me the costume of Esther. What I like the most was the Jewish tradition to bring presents, the so-called 'shelakhmones' [a tray usually filled with sweets and apples]. In the evening the trays with the treats were brought from Madam Stekolshchik and another friend of my mother's, whose husband was the owner of the mill. We treated them as well. Unfortunately, people started to forget about this tradition in the course of time. Even at the end of the 1930s, only several families kept that tradition. I remember one very religious tailor lived at one end of the town and his nephew at the other one, and when they were carrying the treats to each other, people mocked them saying that the tradition was outdated. I am sorry that this festive mood connected with Purim is gone.

Pesach was my favorite holiday. We were on holiday at school. Besides, my brothers Abram and Velvl used to come. Mother got ready for the holiday beforehand. She bought chicken, meat, fish and cleaned the house. There was a present for each member of the family. They had a new coat made for me and ordered new patent-leather shoes for me. The first seder was the most ceremonious one. Father was leaning on the pillows [according to the Jewish tradition the eldest man in the family, the one who conducted seder, was supposed to recline on something soft (usually pillows were used for that), which was the embodiment of relaxation and exemption from slavery], covered with white cloth. Father was wearing festive tallit. Matzah and afikoman were hidden under the pillows. The person who found the afikoman was supposed to get a present. There was traditional food on the table: an egg, a potato, bitter herbs, chicken drumstick and matzah. Apart from the common festive dishes such as stew, gefilte fish, chicken broth there were a lot of dishes from matzah: all kinds of casseroles and tsimes. My brothers stayed with us for the entire holiday period, though they weren't religious any more. They studied in secular universities in the capital. Like most young people of that time they left home and stopped being religious and following Jewish traditions. Rarely, only when they came home, did they participate in the celebration of Jewish holidays, out of respect for their parents and a tribute to traditions.

When I turned seven, I started going to the Jewish school Tarbut [8](#). It was a secular school, where along with common subjects, Hebrew, Jewish history and religion were taught. We studied Jewish literature, read and recited large excerpts from literary works. I had quite a good command of Hebrew at that time, but now I don't remember anything unfortunately. After finishing elementary school I went to State Romanian Lyceum. It was a co-ed, where boys and girls studied. It wasn't hard for me to pass the entrance exams and I was accepted without any bias. There were a lot of Jews in our class as the town was predominantly Jewish, and there was no Jewish lyceum.

I made friends with Jewish children. Slava Milstein was my best friend. Her father was the owner of a store. I also had a friendly relationship with Mara Gerkovich, whose father was a very wealthy man, a manager of a department of the Jewish bank. One boy, Fima Redka, was also my friend. He lived next door. He was from Kishinev. He came to Rezina with his mother and brother after his father had died. In Rezina his grandfather owned a large grocery store. They were very wealthy people. Fima asked his mother to buy textbooks for both of us to be able to see me more often – at that time people shared books to save money – so we studied together. As far as I remember Fima was always by me. He was a funny red-haired boy. I even taught him to embroider and his embroidery was placed next to mine on the annual exhibitions in the lyceum. I was an excellent student. I got prizes every year. The first prize was usually taken by Mara Gerkovich. As a rule, I took the second or the third, sometimes sharing it with Fima. We received books, school paraphernalia, school bags, backpacks. I had studied there for three years and then the lyceum was closed down.

During that time the position of our family had changed. My brother Leibl sent the money from Belgium regularly and finally Father was able to save money to buy his own apartment. He purchased a part of a house with a basement, which belonged to our distant relative. We had a separate entrance in the house. The apartment consisted of three rooms. As usual, there was a store in the first room. The second was a bedroom with three beds: two for my parents, and one for me, and the third one was a sort of a drawing-room combined with a kitchen. Since we didn't have a separate kitchen Mother placed the primus [Primus stove: a small portable stove with a container for about 1 liter of kerosene that was pumped into burners] behind the curtain. The next year Father hired some workers and they joined the kitchen with the balcony to our apartment. We had a wonderful yard. There was a chicken coop in the yard. We also had a wine cellar. We didn't have our own grapes. Father bought them at a cheap price and made wine. We drank homemade wine on Sabbath and on holidays.

The three of us lived in that apartment. Grandmother Charna died in 1935. She was buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions. We were mourning over her. I didn't go to her funeral because of being ill. I remember my grandmother always being brisk and merry.

The coming year brought certain events to our country and in our family life as well. At that time the Bessarabian Jewish youth was divided in two groups – the adherents of Zionism [9](#) and underground Komsomol [10](#) Communists, who were striving for a Soviet mode of life and spreading the ideas of equality and fraternity. My elder brother Abram, who was then living in Rezina, became an active member of an underground Komsomol organization. In Iasi, where he studied at the university, he was seeing a girl and when her parents insisted on the wedding, Abram rejected his bride. He was totally devoted to Communism and reckoned that he couldn't be tied with a nuptial knot. Mother was really worried and shed a lot of tears because of that. Abram was arrested a couple of times, but he didn't stay in prison for a long time. He was released in a couple of months. He was banned from living in Rezina after he graduated from the university, because our town was a frontier one, and the Soviet Union was on the opposite bank of the Dniestr. When Abram graduated from university he began to work for a law firm in Kishinev. Then he moved to a little town close to Bucharest.

Mother knew hardly anything about her younger son Velvl. He finished a couple of years of the medical department. In 1938 Aunt Tuba sent a letter from Ukraine. The letter was written in an



allegoric style and mother understood that Velvl had crossed the border and stayed in Pervomaysk at his aunt's. Our aunt wasn't able to write long frank letters and forbade my mother to respond to her letters. She didn't even indicate her address as she was afraid to be persecuted by the authorities [11](#), but we began to understand those things much later, in the 1940s, when we became citizens of the USSR, when mother was keen to receive letters from abroad with the message about her eldest son.

In 1939 Leibl, who had finally settled in Liege, sent money for Mother and me to come and visit him. I was looking forward to our trip. First, we went to Kishinev. Then we left for Bucharest. In Kishinev my mother and I went shopping and bought fashionable crêpe de Chine dresses and took pictures. We went to Belgium from Bucharest. I don't remember much about Belgium. Leibl met us at the train station. He was so handsome in a dressy three-piece suite. We were with his fiancée. From the train station we went to some spa and stayed there for a month.

When we came back to Rezina my family decided that I should go on with my studies. In September mother took me to Orhei and I entered a lyceum there. I lived with Aunt Rivka for some time. Then Mother rented a room for me. I shared it with two more girls from the lyceum. I lived in Orhei for a year. My parents often came for a visit. My brother Abram came once. I went home for Jewish holidays. Abram used to come as well. Both of us were at the festive table. Once, mother came on a sleigh to take me home for the winter vacation. She also took one of the lads from Rezina, who also studied in Orhei. I knew him, but I didn't communicate with him as he was four years older than me. His name was Froike [full name Froim]. On our way there was a blizzard, the road was covered deeply with snow and we had to stay in a village overnight. The host gave us warm tea. When we came back to Rezina, Froike's mother met us, sobbing, and said that she had lost all hope to see us alive. At that time I liked the handsome and reasonable Froike, but I couldn't envisage that all my adult life would be connected with him and he would become my husband.

I was only one year in Orhei and came back home. In late June 1940 Soviet troops entered Bessarabia and the Soviet power was established. It was rather peaceful. We went out to meet the Soviet soldiers, marching in the streets. They looked dusty, dirty and exhausted. Mother was worried about Abram as he lived on the Romanian territory. There was no news from him for the whole week. On the seventh day the lady from the telephone station came to us and said that Abram was calling. Mother went to have a talk with him. She came back very happy. It turned out that Abram was able to reach Kishinev and called from there. Mother said that she wouldn't let this son go away. She left for Kishinev and came back with Abram the next day.

Abram took an active part in social work and soon was nominated the chairman of the municipal council. He had worked there for a month and then he was transferred to the integrated industrial complex and became its chairman. Abram got married two months after coming back to his native town, to a Jewish girl, Genya. She was the secretary of the municipal council. Abram had known her since taking part in the underground Komsomol organization. She also took an active part in that organization. Genya was even in prison with Abram.

Soon after the Soviets came to power they started to fight against the kulaks [12](#) and carried out nationalization of property. Many owners of stores and other entrepreneurs weren't only sequestrated of their property, but also exiled to Siberia. Many of our acquaintances were predestined for that. The family of my mother's friend Slava Milstein, whose father was the owner

of the mill, was also exiled. Owing to Abram's position as the chairman of the municipal council, we were treated loyally. Father was given the opportunity to sell out his goods and after that his store was requisitioned. Even the apartment, purchased with the money earned due to hard work, was to belong to the nation-wide property. We weren't evicted though, and kept on living in the house which wasn't owned by us any more.

Mother was crying stealthily, and didn't want to say anything to Abram, as he considered all actions of the Soviet regime to be right. Father, who turned sixty, worked as a foreman in some enterprise. I went to the eighth grade of the ordinary Soviet school. First, it was hard for me to study as the classes were in Russian. I was surprised that it didn't take me long to become proficient in Russian. Mother helped me a lot in that, as she was good at Russian. I was a good student. The first year of studies at the Soviet school went by very quickly. I became a pioneer [13](#) and finished the eighth grade ranking top among the students as usual.

### During the war

On Sunday 22nd June 1941 we were expecting guests: my uncle Motle, who worked as a director of a publishing house in Soroca, and his daughter Hayusya. All of us were going to visit Aunt Menya. As usual, Mother got ready to receive guests and baked pies. But the train they took was a couple of hours late. At noon, Molotov [14](#) held a speech on the radio on the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. Our get-together with my uncle and Hayusya was very sad. They left almost at once. In three days, Genya, Abram's wife, gave birth to a girl. She was named Liya after a Communist friend, who perished in a Romanian prison. Germans started bombing the town as there was a bridge across the Dniestr, which was the target for the Germans. Abram decided that we should leave the town and in two weeks the whole family – I, Mother, Father and Genya with her baby – left for Sarateny where Aunt Menya lived. Hardly had we driven a couple of kilometers, as a messenger stopped us and told us to go back. Abram met us and told us to get evacuated immediately. Our things were packed – Genya's sister had done it for us. My brother gave us a big cart and saw us off from the town. It was 6th July. Genya's parents and sisters left with our family, Genya with the baby. Abram stayed in town, where he had to form a new volunteer battalion.

We left our home for uncertainty. We went along the bridge [across the Dniestr] to Rybnitsa [about 90 km east of Kishinev] and in a hamlet about 20 kilometers away from Rybnitsa we met Aunt Menya and Uncle Leizer. They were waiting for their step-daughter Haya, who took their cart. We couldn't even imagine that we saw them for the last time. We were moving very slowly. The infant, who was less than a month old, required a lot of attention. We made frequent stops in Ukrainian villages. I should say that people were very hospitable towards us and treated us very well. We were given warm water in every hut, so we could take a bath and bathe the baby. They gave us milk and bread. Sometimes we had dinner. The food was simple, but it was substantial. I wanted to stay, thinking that the danger wasn't imminent and we would be able to survive the war in one of those hospitable huts.

We reached Pervomaysk, hoping that we would be able to take Velvl and the family of mother's sister Tuba. We were told not to go into the town and stopped in some sort of a forest. Genya's sisters went to the town and found out that Aunt Tuba had already been evacuated. Her neighbors told us that Velvl and Abram who came to Pervomaysk for a visit had left to look for us. In two days, on Friday evening, Abram and Velvl came. Mother was happy in the end – both of her sons

were with her.

Abram and Velvl joined us. Abram's friend, a party member, was with him. They asked to be drafted into the army in the enlistment office in any town we passed by. But Bessarabians were not trusted, and they were told to leave. We reached some station in Donetsk oblast [today Ukraine], gave away our cart and got on a train. It was an echelon with evacuees. It took us a couple of days to get to Rostov oblast, about 1000 kilometers away from home. We were sent to some kolkhoz [15](#) and given lodging by the family of the chairman of this kolkhoz.

Literally in a couple of days, all men who got off the train were summoned to the military enlistment office. First, they didn't want my brothers to be in the lines because they were Bessarabians. Abram showed his documents and the Communist Party membership card and managed to convince them that he, Velvl and his friend Iser should be sent to the front. Before leaving, Abram told me that I was responsible for the family. He also hinted that I shouldn't think of my studies, but go to work to support our elderly parents. My brothers sent a couple of optimistic cards, and in a couple of months we stopped receiving letters from them. We had left the kolkhoz by that time, because the German troops were approaching. However, Genya, her baby, parents and sisters stayed. Her sisters were told to dig the trenches. No matter how many times we insisted, Genya didn't want to leave her sisters. It turned out that the three of us left - my parents and I. After the war we met two Moldovans, who were with us on the trip and stayed with Genya afterwards. They said that Genya's father died shortly after our departure, and Genya, her sisters, mother and the baby, Liya, were shot by the Fascists during one of their actions against the Jewish population.

We got to the district center in a cart, and then we went to Stalingrad [today Volgograd in Russia] oblast [today Russia] by train. We came to some sort of a kolkhoz. Tobacco was grown there and my father went to work there. We were given a room with an oven. We were given firewood in the kolkhoz. Our life was getting better. I also began working. First, I was a worker at the sheep farm. There were very few literate people in the village and I became accounting clerk of the firm. I learned how to ride a horse and a two-wheel carriage. I got up at five o'clock in the morning and went to the farm, where the milkmaids milked the ewes, collected the milk and brought it to the delivery point. I didn't even think of pouring out or sipping the milk, though I was hungry almost all the time. We were given rations in the kolkhoz: oil and wheat. Sometimes they gave us the meat of the dead sheep that had died of disease. We exchanged the things we had taken with us for food products. We lived for half a year in this village. When Stalingrad was being attacked, we moved farther. The chairman of the kolkhoz gave us the best bulls to be harnessed in our cart. We went to Ushakhino, Saratov oblast, and gave the bulls to the local kolkhoz. We still keep that certificate.

In Ushakhino we took the train. It took us a couple of weeks to cross the entire Kazakhstan and reach Kyrgyzstan. We met my cousin Shoilik at one of the stations. He worked for the labor army [16](#), constructing a canal. Mother found out from him that Motle and his family were in Kyrgyzstan. We saw them much later. For a couple of months we lived in Belovodskoye [today Kyrgyzstan, 4000 km from Kishinev]. Father found a job as a guard. My mother and I knitted kerchiefs and blouses and sold them. It was good for us to take a lot of things from home. Now we were able to exchange them for food. Mother found out where Motle was and we came to him. Motle, his wife and two daughters lived in a village not far from Belovodskoye. They lived at the beet receiving station. My favorite cousin Hayusya died there of meningitis in 1942. She was afflicted with

meningitis after typhus fever. I was sent to Frunze [today Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan] to attend the courses of agricultural storekeepers. We were taught how to sort out, grade and pile vegetables. Upon my return I was a forewoman of the vegetable storekeepers.

Then my parents started insisting on my studies. We went to the town of Kant, not far from Bishkek, and rented a room there. Father found a job as a guard at some warehouse. Mother knitted, though it was hard for her, because her eyesight got much worse. I went to school. There were mostly other evacuees in my class. Before I was admitted to the school I had to pass a test. I passed it and was enrolled in the tenth grade. Even though I was two months late, soon I managed to catch up with the rest of the class. I was exceptionally good at sciences: Mathematics and Physics. The physics teacher treated me very well and convinced a Russian teacher to have additional classes with me. Of course, she taught me free-of-charge, because we couldn't afford to pay her. Thanks to that Russian teacher, I was able to finish the tenth grade with honors. There were a lot of Jews in our class and we were friends. My best friends were Iza Kramarova and Manya Kalmanovich. They also were excellent students. Unfortunately, we didn't keep in touch after finishing school. I don't know what happened to them afterwards.

That was the way we lived during the war. Of course, my parents weren't able to observe Jewish traditions. Father was sorry to have left his tefillin at home because of the rush. He had his tallit and every morning Father prayed no matter where we were. I don't remember whether my parents fasted on Yom Kippur. Mother said that there was no need for me to fast as I starved for many days in a year.

In spring 1944, when Bessarabia was being liberated, Uncle Motle was called to come back to his Motherland urgently. He left for Soroca, where he became the director of a publishing house. In the fall, when Kishinev was liberated, he sent us a message. In December we returned to Bessarabia. First we came to Rezina. Father's Moldovan friend Efrem suggested that we live in his house for a while. Although Uncle Motle found an apartment for us in Soroca, mother wasn't willing to leave Rezina, hoping to find out something about her sons. Nobody knew what happened to Velvl and Abram. One of the guys, who had been drafted with them, said that they were surrounded. He was able to break through, and he didn't know anything about my brothers. Father came back to his previous work in the enterprise. We were given an apartment.

### [After the war](#)

Mother insisted on my entering the university. When I was pondering over whether to enter the Teachers' Training Institute or the vocational school, there was an announcement that the Medical Institute was open in Kishinev. It was my dream. Mother also wanted her children to become doctors. My mother and I went to Kishinev. I submitted the documents. I didn't have to take entrance exams as I had a secondary school certificate with honors. Only two months later I received the invitation for the classes.

Mother rented a room for me. I shared it with a girl from our town, who also entered the medical institute. The room was dark. We slept on one bed. Nevertheless, the student years were the best period of my life. I had very many friends. I was an excellent student. In spite of the hard life and hunger, which was almost as bad as during the war we managed to save some money to go dancing, to the cinema and theater. My parents moved to Soroca. They didn't doubt that my brothers had perished. They didn't know anything about Leibl either because of the Iron Curtain [17](#),

removed only long after the war. In the Iron Curtain period there was no communication between the USSR and the rest of the world.

In the summer of 1949 I was at home on vacation. The lad who was with us, when Mama and I were going to Rezina from Orhei for lyceum holidays, was called Froim in his adolescence. Now he was a handsome young man. Froim liked me very much and called on us rather often. His father, Meyer Berko, had died before the war. His mother Esther and his younger brothers were evacuated. Froim went to the lines in 1941. He met his brother Gersh in the vicinity of Stalingrad. They were even in one squad. Froim went through the entire war. He was in Prague, Budapest and Bucharest. He was in Romania, when the victory was declared.

When the war was over, Froim remained in the army for another year and was demobilized in 1946. His brother decided to stay in the army. Froim entered communications institute in Odessa [today Ukraine]. He had studied for a year or two and got in a car crash. He was afflicted with severe headaches, caused by brain concussion. It was hard for Froim to continue with his studies and he decided to come back to Moldova [18](#). He was dying to come back to Moldova when we were seeing each other. I had other pals and admirers, but Froim didn't leave me in peace. He was constantly calling, sending me post-cards. He used to come to see me during weekends. Finally he was transferred to the Physics and Mathematics department of the Kishinev Teachers' Training Institute. In 1949 Froim proposed to me. My parents lived in Kishinev at that time. Father bought a small apartment in the semi-basement premises. We had a festive dinner on the day of our wedding in my parents' apartment and on the second day we continued celebrations in the house of my mother-in-law. My husband's brothers, including Gersh, attended our wedding party.

We moved into our room after the wedding. My husband was transferred to the extramural department. He was hired by professor Sharapov, the leading histologist of the medical institute. My husband turned out to be really talented. He started as a laboratory assistant and gradually became a well-known histologist. Having graduated from the Teachers' Training Institute he became an extramural student of the Medical Institute. I graduated in 1950. I got a mandatory job assignment [19](#) in a village. But they didn't let my husband resign from his work and because of that I was permitted to stay in Kishinev. The same year, in August, I gave birth to a daughter. We named her Anna.

During the first years of our married life we weren't wealthy; we managed to get by just thanks to my husband's two jobs. When my baby turned two months old my maternity leave was over, and in accordance with the legislation of that time I was supposed to go back to work. My mother stayed with our little girl. I worked as a psychotherapist. As a matter of fact I changed my working place. The first years of my working experience were marred by the Doctors' Plot [20](#), and because of that people were prejudiced against Jewish doctors. There were dreadful articles about the doctors-murderers. It was very unpleasant. In Moldova we didn't believe what was written in the papers and in the Soviet regime in general. Frankly speaking, I have never come across anti-Semitism.

At the beginning of the 1950s my father finally received the confirmation that my brothers had perished. My father was supposed to have a pension for having lost a bread-winner. Father was paid the pension for several years and bought a two-room apartment with that money. All of us moved into that apartment. We were very friendly. My mother was a homemaker. On Friday she lit the candles just as in the pre-war period. We celebrated major Jewish holidays. Father brought

matzah from the synagogue. Unfortunately our happy life didn't last long. In 1956 mother fainted in the street because of an apoplectic stroke. She was brought to my hospital, but in spite of my efforts and the combined efforts of the entire personnel, she couldn't be rescued and died.

In 1962 I gave birth to a son and named him Vladimir after my brother Velvl. Froim had to quit his studies after our son was born. He began teaching at an evening school so he could earn more money. Father stayed with us for the whole time, helping me raise my children. In 1969 my father passed away. Froim's mother died in 1973. My parents and Froim's mother were buried in the Jewish sector of the city cemetery in accordance with the Jewish rite.

In 1963 there was a joyful event in our family. Leibl finally found us. He had a nice and prosperous life in Belgium. He came to us for a visit. Leibl looked so handsome, as if from another world, which seemed a very thriving world, where there was no war, shooting, evacuation and famine. Leibl was married to a Belgian lady called Mirez. He had a big family. Leibl was a prosperous pharmacist. My brother started to help us with money and came for a visit a couple of times.

In a while we got a good apartment, where I am currently living. We were happy. My husband became a famous histologist. However, he wasn't able to defend a thesis because he didn't have a medical education. He collected materials for me to write a dissertation for him, but I physically had no time for that because of my job, work about the house, and raising children. However, I have always been happy, feeling loved and cherished by my husband. Froim was highly appreciated in medical circles. He was invited to attend conferences, hold lectures. He was even offered jobs in the clinics and institutes of such great cities as Moscow and Leningrad.

I used to accompany my husband on his trips. I remember that once a local professor came to the hotel we were staying in Leningrad. He tried to talk my husband into moving to Leningrad. He even asked me to influence my husband. But Froim loved Kishinev very much and really wasn't willing to leave anywhere. Maybe it was the reason why he was totally against immigration to Israel or the USA, when my friends and relatives were leaving. They left in the 1970s.

Our children were growing up. We paid a lot of attention to them. In summer time we went on vacation together. But Froim refused to go just before leaving. He had to stay as he had urgent scientific issues and theoretical tasks to deal with during his vacation. We were in the Crimea and in the Caucasus. We skied on the Elbrus Mountain, visited capitals of Central Asia, attended museums in Moscow and Leningrad. In one word - we had a full life. We didn't own a car or a country house, but our life was happy. We met interesting people.

After finishing school my daughter followed in my footsteps. She graduated from the Medical Institute and became a neurologist. Anna was married to a Jew, Grigoriy Sheinfeld, a philologist. However, at first they weren't happy together in spite of the fact that they had a daughter. They divorced and Grigoriy left for the USA. He started writing heart-breaking letters, asking her to come back to him. Finally, Anna and Ella left for the USA. Grigoriy did the right thing. They are very happy together now. Ella and Grigoriy were wed in a chuppah in one of the synagogues in the state of Alabama.

Vladimir graduated from the Electromechanical Vocational School, entered the institute, but he stopped studying. Now he is working for a private company as a mechanic. He got married and had to quit studies when his baby was born. My son's wife Svetlana is a Jew, coming from a family,

where Jewish traditions are observed. I have two grandsons – the elder Maxim and the younger Alexander. Maxim goes to the Jewish school and Alexander attends a Jewish kindergarten.

In 1989 I went to Belgium to see my brother. He has a wonderful house in Liege. He was a happy old man with a large family: children and grandchildren. Leibl died in 1995.

My husband was ill during the last years of his life. He was feeling the consequences of the old trauma. He died two years ago. Our daughter went back to the USA then, because her husband was seriously ill. I didn't work at that time, though I worked for 15 years after reaching the age of retirement. I was called upon to work in Hesed [21](#) as a volunteer. I am currently a volunteer doctor. I have a lot of friends among my husband's former colleagues and among the Jewish community of Kishinev. I am a member of the Jewish community. I take part in the celebration of the holidays. I celebrate Sabbath. I feel utmost content when I am walking along the street and being greeted by people, with whom I don't really keep in touch: my former patients. Of course, I don't remember all of them now. I have been working all my life and restlessly taking care of my family and relatives. In spite of that I can tell you for sure that I have lived a happy life and I am totally entitled to being called a happy woman.

## Glossary:

### **1 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 Moldova.

### **2 Great Patriotic War**

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

### **3 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.

#### **4 Pushkin, Alexandr (1799-1837)**

Russian poet and prose writer, among the foremost figures in Russian literature. Pushkin established the modern poetic language of Russia, using Russian history for the basis of many of his works. His masterpiece is Eugene Onegin, a novel in verse about mutually rejected love. The work also contains witty and perceptive descriptions of Russian society of the period. Pushkin died in a duel.

#### **5 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.

#### **6 Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution the national assembly of Moldovans convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldavian state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldovan capital in January 1918. Upon Moldova's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania: the Moldovans accepted the annexation without any preliminary condition.

#### **7 Iasi University named after A**

Kuza, Romania, was founded in 1860. The Iasi University was an important educational center. Its scientific and educational achievements were highly valued and acknowledged in Romania.

#### **8 Tarbut schools**

Elementary, secondary and technical schools maintained by the Hebrew educational and cultural organization called Tarbut. Most Eastern European countries had such schools between the two world wars but there were especially many in Poland. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the education was Zionist oriented.

#### **9 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut



(Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **10 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.

## **11 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.

## **12 Kulaks**

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

## **13 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.

## **14 Molotov, V**

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

## **15 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 percent of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **16 Labor army**

it was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic

States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war.

## **17 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.

## **18 Moldova**

Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniestr 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 Dniestr 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).

## **19 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.

## **20 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the

worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **21 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.