

Leonid Mariasis

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Growing up

I was born on 20 September 1928. I was called Leon at birth. This name was written in the registry book of all Jews of Bendery town. Later I had the name of Leonid written in my passport. This name is more Russian and I've lived the rest of my life with it. Later it was officially proved that these are two identical names.

I was born in the town of Kebena, Rumania. Kebena was a Rumanian name of the town. When in summer of 1940 it became part of the Soviet Union the town was given its old Turkish name of Bendery. This was a multinational town where Jews, Moldavians, Rumanians, gypsies, Russians and Ukrainians were good neighbors. There were no national conflicts and everybody was minding his own business. There was a cathedral, a Christian church and a synagogue in the central square and everybody was free to go to a church of his choice.

I come from a Jewish family. My father Shabsa Mariasis was born in 1897. He was a businessman during the Rumanian times. He owned a petroleum storage depot and stores. He was a wealthy man. He came from an ordinary Jewish family. My father's father, Itsyk Mariasis was a man of his own standing. He raised 12 children. He tried to give education to all boys in this family. My father knew 6 of them, the others died in their childhood. My grandfather was very kind. He called us "Meine kind" - "my children" in Yiddish. My grandfather spoke Yiddish in his house and so did his family. I remember that my grandfather was very handy. He could make anything with his own hands. People called him "golden hands". I remember him when he was an elderly man, but people still asked him to fix a watch, bind a book, repair or make something. He provided well for his family. My grandfather had a stone house. I don't remember how many rooms there were, but I remember that it was a big house. I remember the living room: there was a big dinner table where the whole family got together. I also remember a gramophone with a big megaphone. It played records with Jewish songs in Yiddish. I remember the songs "Bers little town" ("My little town") and "Oy, mome" ("Oh, Mom"). During the family gatherings on holidays my grandfather said a prayer. I believe he was a very religious man, but I was too young to care then. He always wore a kippah at home and left home wearing a hat and long black jacket. He often went to the synagogue. I loved to visit him at Hanukkah when he had some money saved for me. This is the only holiday that I



remember. I was too small and we didn't visit him that often. I saw my grandfather for the last time in June 1941. He went to the evacuation and died in the town of Guriev (Kazakhstan) in 1943.

I remember my grandmother Ruhl, his wife. I visited her in Kishinev after the war as well, when I was older. She was born in 1875. She was always plump, kind and nice. She always wore a snow-white apron and a white kerchief on her head. My grandmother was religious. She got some education at home, which was not much. However, she knew all prayers very well and she went to the synagogue with my grandfather on holidays. Jewish women came to ask her advice on various matters before and after the war. Every Friday my grandmother lit candles, said prayers and it all seemed a solemnity to us, children.

My father's older brother David, born in 1895, finished grammar school and did some commerce afterwards. The Soviet power sent him away to Novokuznetsk in 1939, because he was a wealthy man that meant that he was a hostile element for the Soviet power. He worked at a plant there. Later his wife Hana and their sons Monia and Efim followed him. I know that they lived there after the war, but I have no more information about them. David died in 1987.

My father's brother Israel (he was called Srulik) born in 1899 became a doctor. He worked in Lutsk for many years. I never met him after the war; so, I don't know anything about his family or when he died.

My father's younger brother Lazar, born in 1903 received a higher engineering education in Rumania. He worked as chief of the laboratory in Kishinev. He died in 1980. His sons Arkadiy and Iosif live in Israel. They are pensioners.

The 3 girls - Golda, born in 1893, Zhenia, born in 1898 and Adel, born in 1905 were educated at home. Teachers from the Russian grammar school came to teach them to write and read Russian, French and music. Their mother taught them housekeeping and Jewish traditions. All sisters married Jewish men, involved in commerce until 1939 (when the Soviet power came to Rumania). After the war my father's sisters lived in Kishinev and I kept in touch with them. My aunts died a long time ago. Golda died of cancer in 1967, Zhenia died of a heart disease in 1973 and Adel died in Haifa in 1993. Adel's daughter Haika lives in Israel and phones me sometimes.

My father Shabsa Mariasis, born in 1897, was the most successful of all grandfather's children. He was quite an intelligent man. He finished the Russian grammar school and got involved in commercial activities. He was a success and in the 1930s he already owned a petroleum storage depot and several stores. He was Chairman of the Commercial Council in Bendery. He led a very active public life and supported many people financially. He was a Zionist. He was for a Jewish state. He believed that Jews had to live together. He believed that only a strong Jewish state could stand against anti-Semitism. My father was very well familiar with the [Beilis1](#) case. He told me about it in every detail. My father often traveled to Palestine in 1920 - 1930s. He was helping immigrants to settle down, supplied food products and medications and conducted classes with immigrants from Russia training them to do business and live in the desert. They published leaflets and other stuff calling all Jews to move to Palestine and establish their own state. These materials were distributed in Europe. He spoke fluent Hebrew (Ivrit). He met with Zeev [Zhabotinskiy2](#) and they had discussions about the future Jewish state. I know that my father was saving money to buy a plot of land in Palestine, but my mother had a poor heart and was afraid of

changing the climate.

As far as I remember, all members of our family were religious. They observed all Jewish traditions, Jewish holidays and fasting. They didn't impose their beliefs on the children. The children were raised democratically in the family. My father mainly prayed at home. On holidays he and mother went to the synagogue. My father had his own seat there. I remember when I grew up my father took me to the synagogue at Yom-Kipur. And when they were making a round with the Torah, they gave me a small Torah and I made the round there. There were two synagogues in Bendery: one for the rich and one for the poor. We attended the synagogue for the rich. This was a bigger synagogue, very richly furnished and decorated. It had golden candle stands and Hanukkah, beautiful fancy dishes, soft comfortable chairs and a huge silver tsdoka (collecting box) for charity contributions at the entrance. The contributions were generous and big. I know that all Jews in Bendery went to the synagogue. I remember the rabbi greeting the Jews at the synagogue with a holiday.

My father often traveled to other towns on business. In 1919 my father met the daughter of a rich businessman Mikhel Patlazhan. Her name was Perlia and she was 19 years old. She was born in 1900. She finished the grammar school for girls in Kishinev. She was a very pretty girl and they had a rich Jewish wedding in 1920. They had a wedding party in Kishinev and then, when my father took his young wife to Bendery they had another wedding party. Before the wedding my father and grandfather Patlazhan developed a *tnoim* (a written engagement agreement. It includes information about the dowry, presents, etc.). It was customary for rich people.

My mother's father Mikhel Patlazhan born in Kishinev in 1872 was a wealthy man. He owned a few houses and he leased apartments. I think he finished cheder. He observed Jewish tradition when they were in no conflict with his business. If he had business on Saturday, he did it instead of celebrating Sabbath. He wore no beard and smoked on Saturday. But still my grandfather went to the synagogue on big holidays like Purim, Pesach, Yom-Kippur and Hanukkah. My grandfather was very close with his older brother Pynia. Born in 1868 that owned the textile business. I don't know anything about Pynia's family. He always came alone when we were visiting my grandfather in Kishinev. Pynia and Grandfather Mikhel Patlazhan perished in 1941 when fascists came to Kishinev. I don't remember my grandmother or her name. I know that she died of dropsy in 1934 when she was 55.

The Patlazhans had 6 daughters: my mother, Nyunia, Liza, Sonia, Fira and the youngest Riva. Riva died of dysentery in the evacuation in Middle Asia. She was looking after the grandfather when he was ill and caught the disease from him. Nyunia, born in 1897 married Itshak in 1919. He was a chemical engineer and worked as a chemist during the Soviet power. After the war they returned to Kishinev. Liza, born in 1904 worked at the bakery. During the war she was in the evacuation in Middle Asia with her son Aron. After the war they returned to Kishinev. They visited us four times in Siberia. Fira, born in 1902, was a housewife. Her husband Haim had died. Her daughter Rachil got married around 1970s and they moved to Israel. Fira died in Israel in 1987. Sonia, born in 1906, married a pharmacist. Her daughter Alice worked at the pharmacy her whole life. Now she is a pensioner and lives in Kishinev. Sonia died in 1980. Grandfather Patlazhan's daughters studied at Kishinev grammar school. They were very fond of music and very close with one another. They spoke Yiddish in the family. All girls knew Russian well as they had studied at the Russian grammar

school. They were moderately religious. They went to the synagogue on big Jewish holidays, followed some of the kashruth rules. None of the family ate pork and there was matsa at home at Pesach. They didn't wear shawls.

My mother Perlia Patlazhan was born in Kishinev in 1900. My mother, however, remembered the pogrom in 1903. She was only 3 years old. But she remembered how one of her relatives in Kishinev was blinded. She remembered these horrible things and told me the story mentioning some names, but I don't remember them. My mother studied music, like her sisters, and there was a teacher to teach the girls Yiddish, their "mother tongue" and Hebrew. My mother studied at the Goldenberg private Russian grammar school for Jewish girls. Kishinev was a trade center. There where many rich Jewish merchants living there. There was a standard rate of 5% for the Jews at grammar schools. Private schools were established to give education to Jewish children. They had the same educational programs as state grammar schools; only there was a rabbi to teach religion instead of a Christian priest. My mother, her sisters and friends had a typical childhood of children from rich families: music lessons, walks and parties. My mother told me about her friends, but I didn't listen to her, I wasn't interested and was far from this subject at the time.

The Civil War of 1914-1917 didn't have an impact on the life in Kishinev (it was still a part of the Russian Empire). In 1920 Bessarabia (Moldova) became a Rumanian territory; so, their high life continued. My mother, however, remembered the pogrom in 1903. She was only 3 years old. But she remembered how one of her relatives in Kishinev was blinded. She remembered these horrible things and told me the story mentioning some names, but I don't remember them.

At 19 my mother married my father and moved to Bendery. In 1920 their daughter Dora Mariasis was born. She was called Dvoira at birth, but everybody called her Dora. The state rabbi - his name was Derbaremdiker, I remember, had a rooster with all birth records. The rabbi didn't issue birth certificates, but he issued an official birth extract from this rooster. Theses extracts were notified and stamped.

My father built a good one-storied building. There were just few two- or three-storied buildings in Bendery at that time. There was a big yard near the house that served as petroleum storage depot. There were huge underground tanks for petroleum. We occupied 5 rooms in the house; children's rooms, a dining room, a living room, a bedroom and a hallway. It was a beautiful house in the center of the town not far from the railway station. There were few other apartments in our building that were on lease. Our apartment was very nice. We had a very nice apartment. We had lovely dishes, tablecloths and furniture from Vienna. There was no electricity in Bendery until 1930 when the power plant was built. So, we used kerosene lamps before. However, my father bought a power generator. It was a luxury in Bendery and people came to take a look at the wonderful machine. There were primus stoves in the kitchen. We had a Jewish cook. There were women to do the cleaning and washing. They were not necessarily Jewish. My nanny Katia was not Jewish. My only memory of her is when I once cut her summer dress with scissors.

My sister Dora had a Bluthner piano in her room. It was a very good piano. My father brought it from Austria. My sister Dora had a music teacher and could play fairly well. My parents wanted me to learn to play the violin, but I understand now that I have a poor ear for music. What was most important was that I had music classes in the evening when all other boys went to the skating-rink and my classes where the last thing I needed. I oiled the fiddlestick and the teacher stopped

coming to us. This was the end of my musical career. My teacher was a smart and kind man and he didn't punish me for my tricks.

We celebrated all Jewish holidays in our family. I remember Rosh Hashanah. Just before the holiday the Jewish community organized a lottery on this holiday and my mother and father went to the building of the Commercial Council for a whole night. They were all dressed up. My mother was a very beautiful woman and she was nominated to conduct the charity lottery and the auction. The collected money was sent to give education to Jewish children from poor families and support poor Jewish families. At Yom-Kipur my father and mother fasted. My parents always supported Jewish talents. Sidi Tahl, a Jewish singer from Chernovtsy used to give concerts in Bendery. My mother and sister took tickets to the rich families to collect money for her concerts. At Yom-Kippur my father and mother fasted. On Purim mother baked *hamantaschen*³, she also prepared, chicken broth with dumplings. Father read a prayer. In the evening musicians came and played Jewish melodies and later mother would give them money and feed them. I don't remember Purimshpil, I only remember meals at our house. On Hanukkah candles were lit by our father. We had a beautiful Hanukkiah. For Passover we bought matzoh. There were special bakeries that made it. We had matzoh delivered in a giant canvass sack. No bread was consumed over Passover, God forbid! Mother was in the kitchen all day long. She had beautiful Passover, dishes, which were never used on other occasions. We heated geese fat and made cracklings. We roasted potatoes with cracklings, made different kugels - from potato and matzoh, we made gefilte fish and chicken broth. Each day we had visitors and a lot of food had to prepared. Of course I always helped. During Passover, the kitchen was very animated and fun. I crushed matzoh in a large mortar and made flour. It was then sifted. Fine flour for cakes and whatever remained in the sieve mother would mix with eggs and make dumplings for chicken broth, the kneidlach. Mother also baked delicious Passover cookies.

My parents spoke Yiddish to one another and Russian to us, children. My parents only had Jewish friends and so did I. Many of my friends went to Israel.. We, children, communicated in Russian. There lived Rumanians that had arrived in 1918-1919, when Bessarabia became a part of Rumania. There were also Russians, Jews and Moldavians in Bessarabia. The Rumanians were sort of foreign elements. They even had their own stores and only spoke Rumanian. They were very nationalistic and anti-Semitic. There was a slogan during the Rumanian times "Zhydan to Palestine", meaning "Jews. Go to Palestine". It was almost a state slogan. Their negative attitude towards Jews was felt everywhere. I had to go to the Rumanian grammar school, because all other schools were closed by the Rumanian authorities. I had no problems with the language; young children ach a new language easily.

I had a teacher of Torah that came to teach me at home. His name was Ruzhanskiy and he was a Jew. He told me stories from the Torah in Yiddish and I always admired them. I was amazed how Moses raised his hand over the sea opening a path through the war. He also taught me Hebrew. My father was preparing to move to Palestine and wanted me to be prepared for the departure.

My mother and I often visited my grandfather Patlazhan in Kishinev in 1930s. I remember their discussion about the private Jewish grammar school of Schwartzman in Kishinev. My grandfather suggested that my parents sent me to study there. My parents were afraid that I was too young to leave home, so I continued my studies at the Rumanian grammar school. I spoke Rumanian at

school, Russian at home and read Russian books of which we had a collection at home. My father had bookcases in his study and I remember the old books in heavy leather bindings. They were Russian classical books, encyclopedia dictionaries, French books and my father's books on commerce and accounting. I don't remember any Jewish books except for the book of Torah and textbooks.

I remember 1939, the troubled time. Rumanians opened their boundary to Polish Jews that managed to escape from fascists. There were many of them at the railway station. Our house was near the station and my mother and father sent us to take luncheons to the refugees. These people had a lot of children and luggage and they were all scared and miserable. They didn't tell us anything about what was happening to the Jews in Poland. It was probably unbearably difficult for them to talk about extermination of hundreds of thousands of people.

In 1940 the Soviet troops entered Bessarabia breaking our father's plans about departure to Palestine, he never lost hope that mother would recover and we would move to Palestine. It came as a surprise to us. We just heard an ultimatum on the radio followed by entrance of the troops. My father still submitted documents for our departure to Palestine, but he never got a permit.

My father was quite enthusiastic about the Soviet power. We had no information about what was actually happening in the country, about arrests or famine. It never occurred to us that somebody would wish to destroy our well being. We didn't hurt anyone, vice versa, we always did charity. After the Soviet power took away our house and we had to move into a smaller house with only two rooms. Our house was given to the officers from the Soviet Union. They also took away my father's petroleum storage depot. They issued him a passport where his social origin was determined as a "merchant" meaning that he was a hostile element to the Soviet power. He couldn't find a job. My father did some joiner's work earning the living for his family. This turning in life was tough for my parents. My sister Dora had finished a grammar school by then and passed her baccalaureate exam. Education at Bendery grammar school was very good. They studied French and Latin and Dora's French was fluent. She had a collection of French books. In 1940 she entered the Commercial academy in Bucharest and studied there for a year. In 1941 she left Rumania for Bendery on almost the last train, before Germans entered the country.

I saw the "file" of our family recently. All Soviet archives with information about every individual were preserved in Moldova. People got access to them in the middle of 1990s. Well, there are reports of complete outsiders in this file, like some woman writing "I hear he was a very rich man, but I didn't know him personally" about my father. Another one wrote that he knew for sure that my father was a businessman and had a turnover of a million, etc.

Wartime

On 13 June 1941 a cart stopped in front of our house at night. We were told to move. We were only allowed to take some clothing and documents, but no jewelry. Soviet officers were supervising the process. We were taken to the railway station and ordered to board the train for transportation of cattle. This wasn't an anti-Jewish action. Nobody can explain what kind of action this was. There were Moldavians, Rumanians and Russians and, of course, there were many Jews on the train. They were richer and poorer and, of course, there were many Jews. There were 380 families (women, old people and children) to be removed (there were women, old people and children). My father and

many other men were separated from us. There were 50 people in each railcar and we slept on planks. We were not allowed to get off the train when it stopped. We arrived at the point of destination on 25 July and we didn't know that the war had begun. We happened to end up in Siberia – the Soviet farmyard “Tripolie” not far from Tumen. We were told that we were special deportees and that we were not allowed to leave. We were supposed to go to work on the following day. We were living on the field until the middle of summer. We were involved in harvesting and construction of the livestock farm. My mother was having a difficult time. She wasn't used to such life and she was spoiled in her previous life. She went to work in the field wearing high-heeled shoes – she just didn't have other shoes. We were working at the construction site and she went weeding. We didn't know where our father was or where the other men were. We were trying to get in touch with my father hoping that he was alive. Later we were told that he was under investigation and then sent to a penitentiary work camp in Siberia. We were moved to the barracks when it got cold. I wanted to go to the 7th form at school. I had a suitcase full of books, but I never took them out of the suitcase as we had to work all year round. There was no time for studying. There were many people from Moldavia, Western Ukraine and Baltic republics with us. We all got along well. There was no anti-Semitism, we were all in the same boat. We were paid peanuts for our hard work, but this was enough to make ends meet. There was one food store. They had bread delivery twice a week. Within one hour upon delivery the shelves were empty. We bought fish and vegetables from the local vendors. Many people exchanged their belongings for food, some of them had jewelry. People didn't starve to death, but the climate was deathly for many of them. It was very cold and there was no heating in the barracks. People didn't have enough warm clothes. People fell ill, but there was no doctor and they had to go to work anyway, regardless of their condition. Many people were dying in the field or on the construction site.

In July 1942 we were told to board the truck and we moved again. There was no explanation this time either. We boarded the ship and sailed up the Ob River in Siberia to Salekhard. One could only see such boat in the cinema. Two huge wheels were splashing through the water and we were sitting on deck bit by huge mosquitoes. Salekhard is on the polar circle in Yamalo-Nenetskiy region. There was a secondary school there, a fish cannery and few plants in this town. At first we were accommodated in the barracks. There was a special settlement for *the repressed in the 1930s* [4](#). They treated us with understanding. Later we were accommodated in a small room of 10 square meters in a wooden house. I met most interesting people during this period. Most of them in this exile were representatives of intelligentsia of 1920s and 1930s. I remember Faggis, an older woman. She was a *Bundovka* [5](#). She worked at the library. We remembered about Jewish rituals and traditions, but it was not possible to observe them. For example, on Saturday my mother had to go to work and I had to go to school. We also had a quiet celebration of my turning 13 years of age in 1942. I didn't have a barmitsva. There were no Jews familiar with this rituals in our settlement.

In Salekhard life was easier a little bit. My sister went to work as a teacher of foreign languages. She had fluent French and German. I went to study at school. It was a two-storied wooden building. We had nice teachers. They were all women and there was one man, teacher of mathematics. He had no arm. I was eager to study. We studied when the temperature was 40°C below zero, but when it dropped to -50°C we had to stay at home. We went to school in winter and worked in summer. We also went to work during our studies: at the fish cannery or at the dock to load boxes. We were working like everybody else to support the front. In summer we were sent to the

haymaking area at an island. There were no adults with us and we made a kind of a hut from hay to sleep at night. There were children of many nationalities: Finnish, Greek, Ukrainian and Lithuanian, and we all got along very well. The sanitary conditions were terrible, though. We had lice. We had a bet whose louse was the biggest and it turned out to be mine. We washed ourselves in the river. The water was very cold there. There were lots of mosquitoes.

The Nenets children (native Northern people) lived in the hostel and had a separate school. I went to see them several times. They were living a primitive life with no electricity, books or any culture whatsoever. They were forced to go to school against their will. They were almost wild and they didn't want to study. They were taken away from their parents and their homes. I felt sorry for these people.

My father joined us in 1943. He told us that he was judged by the "troika" – 3 people that just read his sentence: 5 years in a prison camp with no right to write letters. He was under trial as an enemy of the Soviet power, Zionit and a spy for Israel. He said he was very lucky to have escaped, because if he had stayed he wouldn't have survived. He was in the Ivdel camp in Sverdlovsk region for two years. He was released because he had diabetes and needed insulin injections. He didn't tell us anything about the camp. He wanted to forget that time. He obtained a permit to reside where he wished. He arrived at where we were and obtained his passport from the authorities. But in some time the authorities took away his passport and he became a special deportee like all of us. He didn't have the right to move around. It was mandatory for everyone to work. My father worked as a merchandise expert at a big cannery. He was very hardworking and he loved to work. My father easily adjusted to life in Siberia. He loved the Russian sauna especially. When my father started to work we received a small Finnish house. The nature in the north is beautiful. Summer lasts only a month and a half, but there were mushrooms and berries in a hundred meters from our house and there were ducks near the lake. , I killed a couple of wild ducks with a stick. One could also buy fish at the market at that time, but we didn't have any of these at home. My mother didn't get used to hard conditions and climate. She didn't work officially, but she did go to work when there were appeals for emergency work in Salekhard, like making an ice-hole to provide potable water for the people. The ice was two meters deep and it took quite an effort to break it.

Such conditions of life didn't allow my father to observe Jewish traditions, so we only observed fasting in the family. There was a rabbi from Kaunas that had Jewish calendars so we knew when the holidays are, although it was strictly forbidden. He had other religious books as well. My father prayed at home every day. My mother managed to bring the book of prayers. Sometimes on holidays religious Jews gathered at the rabbi's home. This happened very rarely, because all the people did work hard and had no days off. The Jews tried to get together at Jewish holidays. There were many of them. There was the family of Shtiry and Lichnik from Bendery and there were Jews from other locations. Younger people didn't fast or celebrate holidays. Older people spoke Yiddish at their gatherings. There was no matsa, of course, it was just out of the question. When my father returned in 1943 he went back to work at the cannery and then my sister also went to work as an economist there. We received 600 grams of bread during the war and we knew what hunger was like. Sometimes we received fish heads. Those were big heads of sturgeon weighing about 2 kilos and there was a lot of meat in them.

We could read in newspapers what was going on at the front. We also had a radio. Military science was a very important subject at school. We were taken to the military camps. Once when I was at the military camp we were told that we could become Komsomol members in the camp. I mentioned to our military tutor that we were special deportees and asked him if we were allowed to become Komsomol members. His reply was that all people living there were special deportees and agreed to give us a recommendation. On the following day we all became Komsomol members. I was finishing school in 1945. In that year the school certificate was introduced.

After the war

I remember 9 May 1945. Our military tutor congratulated us with the victory. He was a big strong man and he was training us in military disciplines, but when then he couldn't hold his tears of happiness. Victory was a big happiness for our family, too. I remember my father said "If people glorify Stalin it is because they love him". He used to say it several times.

I finished school, but to leave Salekhard we needed to obtain a permit from the commandant office. We didn't have passports and had to attend the commandant office every second week. Such was the procedure. Every individual had to show up there in person. Another problem with leaving this area was that there was poor communications with the Big Land. In winter one could fly by plane and in summer - take the boat. I also heard that it was possible to go on deer driven cart via Vorkuta, but it was a hard route.

I worked at the radio station for a year (1945-1946). I was an apprentice at first and then became a radio operator. It was a very powerful radio station supporting communications with Dickson Island and Novosibirsk. We broadcast weather reports in Siberia - this information is very important there. I enjoyed working there, but I wanted to continue my studies.

For a whole year I was trying to obtain a permit for departure. The nearest bigger town was Tumen, and it was the farthest where I could be allowed to go. There was only one higher educational institution in Tumen and this was a pedagogical institute. In 1946 I went to Tumen by boat. I didn't get my passport. Instead, the commandant office issued a paper obliging me to register in Tumen. I passed exams to the institute and was admitted.

Tumen was a regional town and it seemed huge to me compared with Salekhard. Now I realize that it was a provincial town of wooden houses. There were even wooden pavements. I entered historical department of Tumen Pedagogical Institute without a problem. I got accommodation at the hostel and went to NKVD (People's Commissariat of internal Affairs) Chief officer to ask his permission to let my sister come visit me. I obtained his permission in the late autumn of 1946. My sister came by plain. She got a job of mechanical engineer. Later we both went to NKVD Chief officer to ask permission for our parents to join us. We obtained the required permission immediately and in 1946 all our family reunited in Tumen. I was studying and my father went to work at the automobile plant. This plant manufactured electrical devices for tanks and vehicles. It mainly supplied Miass, an industrial town in the Ural). My father was logistics manager. He was a very good expert and nobody cared that he was a special deportee. He got his job and nobody ever reproached him for being who he was.

At first we stayed with some acquaintances, but later we rented an apartment. My mother's sisters Sonia and Liza from Kishinev visited us. They returned to Kishinev from the evacuation, but we couldn't return and be with them because we didn't have passports and we didn't have a right to leave without permission of KGB. In 1950 I graduated from the Institute and went to work as a teacher in a village. I heard about Stalin's death in this village. The First Secretary of the district Party Committee Mikhailov called us for a meeting to declare that Stalin had died. He was crying while saying this. I didn't have any feelings. This Mikhailov was a very decent man. I was very lucky to have met many decent people. I worked at the village five years until the authorities issued a decree allowing people to resign freely. I resigned. I taught farmers' children, the children of the district Party committee secretary, the children of the commandant (I had to register myself in his office every other week) and even the children of NKVD Chief Officer. This school was a one-storied wooden building. There were 30-35 children in class. I received a room at the boarding school. The boarding school served for children from other villages. They were talented children. I met with them later in Tumen. People treated me very well. People in Siberia didn't know any difference between a Jew and non-Jew. People in Siberia are healthy hard-working people. They didn't have a chance to earn money to make their own living. Their wages were very low and they were very poor.

After I returned to Tumen in 1955 I decided to change my profession. I wanted to enter machine-building institute in Sverdlovsk, but I failed. I got a refusal in a very friendly manner. Besides my being a deportee I was also a Jew. So, I went to work as a teacher of physics in Tumen. One day in 1956 I went to the commandant office to register my presence and the officer there said "You are taken off the books. Tell the deputy director at your school that she has to come to be taken off the books as well". It meant that she or I didn't have to go regularly to this office to register our presence in the town. It didn't ever occur to me that she was a deportee. These people in power understood that it was about time to have things changed for us and allow us more freedom.

There were many Jews in Tumen and they were very well settled. I remember that director of the battery plant (Shapiro) was a Jew. Khutorinskiy, chief engineer at the automobile plant where my father was working was also a Jew.

In 1956 we obtained passports and could move around the country. We lived 15 years in total in Siberia. My sister studied by correspondence in Sverdlovsk Industrial Institute and graduated from it. She became a professional economist and worked at the plant where my father was working. Chief engineer of this same plant moved to Lvov and got a job at the bicycle plant. He offered employment to my father and sister. My sister was offered a job of economist in the planning department and my father was offered position of logistics manager. My mother also left with them. I had to stay in Tumen until the end of the academic year. I arrived in Lvov in the end of 1956.

My parents were living in a rented room. Director's office of the bicycle plant promised to give us a room, but time went by and we didn't receive a room. I managed to get a job at school as a teacher of physics. I received a room at school. I worked in this school #28 for many years. My mother was eager to move to Kishinev to her relatives. My mother's and father's sisters Zhenia and Golda lived there. My parents and sister lived in Lvov for two years.

In 1958 my parents and sister moved to Kishinev and received an apartment there. My father didn't work in Kishinev. His diabetes got worse and my father died in 1974. My parents and sister always observed Jewish traditions, Sabbath and fasting, they went to the synagogue, they didn't follow the kashruth, but they didn't eat pork. They spoke Yiddish at home. My mother lived after my father died, with my sister that worked as an economist at the scientific research machine-building institute. My mother died in 1989. She had a poor heart and died of breast cancer. I often visited and supported my family, but I didn't want to leave Lvov. I loved my job and my pupils and I also liked my cooperative apartment that I bought later. There was anti-Semitism in Lvov and the general attitude was anti-Semitic. Once I was in a bus and a man said to me "Well, you zhyd have survived. O'K I will arrange another Auschwitz and Babiy Yar⁶, and it will be worse than it was, you will all know!" I replied "Your Jesus was a zhyd, you know". And he shut up. There were other incidents happening to me or my friends, but as I said, there were many decent and honest people and I was very lucky to meet so many of them. I was treated very well at school. I was a good specialist and got along well with children.

I have met with women, but I don't have a family. My sister Dora is also single. She was very ill in the last years of her life. In 1998 she fell and broke her hipbone. She was confined to bed and employees of the Chesed in Kishinev (Jewish charity organization) looked after her. Dora died in Kishinev in 1999. I am retired now. I correspond with my relatives in Israel. But I do not dare to move there. I am old and ill. I will be of no use to them. I don't know the language and I won't be able to learn it. I studied it a little when I was a child, but I've forgotten it for the most part. I'm not a religious man, but I admire the state built in a desert. I'm used to living here on my miserable pension. I do not observe Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. I've forgotten them, besides, a Soviet teacher wasn't allowed to observe any religiosity and it is too late to begin it. I am very fond of fishing. If I catch a fish I can make stuffed fish that tastes better than my mother's. I dry average size fish and give the small ones to my neighbor's cat.

Glossary

¹ BEILIS CASE, trial (Kiev, 1913) M. Beilis, a Jew, was falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Russian boy. This trial was arranged by the tsarist government and the Black Hundreds. It raised the protest of all the progressive people in Russia and abroad. The jury finally acquitted him.

² ZHABOTINSKIY Vladimir (Zeev) (1880-1940), writer and Zionist movement activist. Lived in Russia before 1914, and in France for the most part after 1920. He wrote in Russian, Hebrew and French. In his stories, articles and plays he expressed the idea of national self-consciousness and renaissance of the Russian Jews.

³ triangular tarts with poppy seed and nuts

⁴ In the mid-1930s Stalin launched a major campaign of political terror. The purges, arrests, and deportations to labor camps touched virtually every family. Untold numbers of party, industrial, and military leaders disappeared during the "Great Terror". Indeed, between 1934 and 1938 two-thirds of the members of the 1934 Central Committee were sentenced and executed.

5 BUND (Bund in Yiddish means a “union”) (“General Jewish Union of Working People in Lithuania, Poland and Russia”): a social democratic organization representing Jewish handicraftsmen of the Western areas in the Russian Empire. It was founded in Vilno in 1897. In 1898-1903 and from 1906 the autonomous fraction in the Russian Social Democratic Working Party adhered to the Menshevist position. After the Great October Socialist Revolution the organization split: one half was against the Soviet power and another stayed in the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks. In 1921 The Bund self-eliminated

6 Babiy Yar is the site of the first mass shootings of the Jewish population that was done in the open by the fascists on September 29-30, 1941, in Kiev.