

Zinaida Minevich

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My family background

My uncle told me a family legend. I don't know who my uncle heard it from or whether it was true.

In the middle of the 19th century there were 5 or 6 Minevich families: they were brothers and sisters of my great grandfather on my father's side living in the town of Penizevichi near Malin, Kiev region. They descended from my great grandmother Pesia-Beila that married a pious and fanatically religious Jew from Mozyr, a Byelorussian town. Her husband never worked in his life. He only prayed and read religious books; he wouldn't even make himself a cup of tea. My grandmother did some small trade and provided for the family. Her husband died at the age of 60 in 1890s and my great grandmother lived to be 113.

My grandfather on my father's side Meyer lived in Penizevichi town, Malinskiy district, Kiev province. Almost all population of this town was poor Jewish families from old times till 1941. Most of them were fanatically religious. They were vendors and handicrafts. Some of them were renting gardens to sell fruit. They lived in peace with their neighbors - Ukrainian farmers. My grandfather was born around 1870s. He knew Hebrew and Yiddish. He studied in some religious institution, but I don't know what it was. He had a beautiful voice and sang as a cantor on holidays at the synagogue in Malin. It took about an hour to walk to Malin from Penizevichi, a small town near Kiev. My grandfather never would travel on holiday. There were quite a few Jews living in Malin before 1917.

My grandfather had a beard and long Jewish hair locks. He never cut them, only trimmed, kept them very clean and combed often. He had two long jackets: one casual linen jacket for everyday wear and one fancy satin jacket for holidays. Grandfather only spent Saturday and Sunday at home. The rest of days he was in villages buying cattle (calves or cows), taking it to the shoihet that was slaughtering them for kosher meat. Then he sold the front part (kosher) meat to Jews at the local market and the rear part meat (non kosher) - to customers of other nationalities. In this way he earned few rubles per week that was hardly enough to buy food for the family.

The rabbi of the town, his wife and their many children lived in a small house with a thatched roof.



In the middle of 1900s my grandfather quit traveling and began to rent an orchard in summer from a local landlord. The whole family was working in this orchard. They were selling fruit from the orchard to the locals at the market in Malin. A bucket of pears or apples cost maximum 5 kopecks. Their earnings were modest but it was a safer business than traveling in villages in any weather looking for a calf to buy. My grandfather's family was considered wealthy. They had a vegetable garden and kept a cow. On Saturday my grandmother baked halas. On holidays they ate meat or fish. In summer they made food products stocks for winter: flour, cereals, beans, peas and salted meat, potatoes, onions and garlic. They made pickles and sauerkraut. They also fed geese to sell fat at the market in Malin and freeze the meat. They also made stocks of wood, hay and straw for the cow.

The family lived in a small house with thatched roof. All houses in the village had thatched roofs, except for the priest's house and school building. My grandfather and grandmother slept on the narrow wooden beds. They had planks instead of mattresses. The children slept on wooden divan beds covered with sacking. There was a wooden termite corroded cupboard, a big plank table and few stools in the dining room. There were many plants in the pots in the room.

My grandfather had good relationships with the Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors. People asked him to explain them a meaning of what they read in a book or a piece of advice. They also borrowed money from him, but he didn't charge any interest. Even the Ukrainian landlord that leased his orchard to my grandfather acknowledged his authority. There was a very warm atmosphere in their house. They all supported one another and older children helped the younger ones. My grandfather never punished his children. His angry word was punishment enough for them. My grandfather was a very religious man. He observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated Sabbath and holidays. He said that one had to follow all rules as specified in the Torah. He followed the law himself and demanded that his children observed the rules, too.

There was another story told in our family. The landlord once asked his servant for my grandfather. He was having a party and was drunken already. When my grandfather came to his house he introduced him to his guests as a smart and business oriented Jew and forced him to drink a glass of vodka. My grandfather had never had any vodka before. After he drank it he almost died.

My grandmother on my father's side Riva finished a religious school. She could read and write, but she didn't know Russian. She spoke a mixture of Yiddish and Ukrainian. She got married when she was 16. Her husband's last name was Stoliar, but later he changed it to Stoliarov. They lived in the town of Penizevichi, Malin district, Kiev province. Her husband was a ruthless man. My grandmother was a nice woman. She was trying her best to get adjusted, but it was impossible. She was strong enough to leave her husband even if it was against her principles as a religious woman. Her husband was to raise their son David according to religious rules.

In 1904-1905 she married Meyer Minovich, a widower. He had two daughters in his first marriage: Zina and Clara. The mothers of the girls died when they were too young and they accepted their stepmother very nicely. My grandmother had 13 children, but only my father and uncle Isaac survived. One boy died after a road accident and other children died from diseases. My grandmother was fanatically religious. She used to say "God gave them and He took them away". She never complained. She prayed every day. My grandmother was a very kind and cheerful woman.

In 1918 my grandfather was killed by a shot through the window during one of *Petlura's*¹ pogroms². He was praying at that time. He was buried with *jó étvágyat!* his thales and tfiln at the cemetery in Malin. The pogrom makers must have seen him through the window and shot him deliberately. The whole village came to his funeral. In few days the family moved to Malin in fear of pogroms. In 1921 they moved to Kiev. My grandmother's son from her first marriage David Stoliarov was studying at the Medical Institute in Kiev at that time.

They just left their house in the village 1918. They didn't sell the house, because there were no buyers. In 1931 my uncle Isaac, the older son of my grandfather, went to Penizevichi hoping to sell the house, but it had been removed by then and there was a store under construction on this spot. My uncle was staying at one of his non-Jewish acquaintance's house. My uncle witnessed the process of the kulaks³. My uncle said that this acquaintance had a good orderly house with ground clayed floors. There were icons and embroidered towels hanging on the walls in one room. The owner of the house told my uncle that he was unwilling to join the collective farm because he had to give away all his livestock and he was afraid that nobody would look after it properly. He realized that the collective farm was a mess and his livestock would probably starve to death and so would members of his family. My uncle did convince him to join the collective farm, but it was too late. Three Soviet representatives came to his house at night, declared that a decision had been taken to move his family out of their house and allowed him one our to pack up. The couple began to pack, telling them that they didn't have any riches, that they had been working hard to get what they had and that they had nothing against the Soviet power, but nothing helped. They packed 4 or 5 bags and went on a cart to the railway station in Malin where there were *freight railcars*⁴ waiting for people. Later my uncle found out that this family managed to survive and they lived in Gorky in Russia.

She got married 6 times. I have no information about my grandmother's previous marriages. She got married for the last time in 1934 when her son Abraham was already married. My grandmother only married religious Jews. Her last husband was a rabbi. I don't know anything about him. He died before the war. How she managed to get married so many times - she looked after single men or widowers. Their relationships developed into attachment and they began to live together.

David Stoliarov, my grandmother's son from the first marriage, was born in 1902. I don't know anything about his childhood. But when he grew up he found his mother (my grandmother) and he always supported her. In 1924 he graduated from Kiev Medical Institute and got a job assignment in Bukhara, Middle Asia. Upon completion of his job assignment he went to Moscow and got employed as a doctor there. During the war in 1941 - 1945 he worked as a military doctor in military hospital and later became director of a military hospital. He was a very nice and supportive man, quite unlike his father. His daughter Clara took after her father (my grandmother's first husband) and grew up a hard person. She is a doctor and lives in Germany now. David Stoliarov became Director of NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) hospital and was promoted to the rank of colonel. He died in Moscow in 1967.

My father's stepsister Zina Minevich was born in 1898. After 1917 she married Isaac Stoliar that was living in Penizevichi. In 1925 they left for Argentina. Her husband's relative was residing there. I only know about her that she died in Buenos-Aires in 1968.

Clara Minevich, the daughter of my grandfather and his first wife, was born in the early 1900s. After the Great Patriotic War she lived in Tashkent with her husband that was 10 years older than she. In 1941-42 she received notification that her son perished at the front. But it turned out that he was captured by Germans. He escaped from captivity and joined a partisan unit. He was fighting in it until 1944. He finished the war in the rank of captain and with many awards. He found his parents. After the war he lived in Tashkent with his family. Clara died in 1980s. That's all I know about them.

My father's brother Isaac Minevich was born in 1907. He studied at the cheder and knew Hebrew well. At 12 he began to look for jobs to help his parents. He went from house to house on cold nights purchasing pig bristle from farmers after they had their Christmas pigs slaughtered. He was selling bristle to wholesale traders in Malin. He gave all money he earned to his mother.

In 1926 he went to Bukhara in Middle Asia. There were many Jews in this town. There is an ethnic group of Bukhara Jews that celebrate all Jewish traditions, but look very much like oriental people and have oriental mentality. David was a doctor in Bukhara. David helped him to get a job at the Sovtorgflot office. The office was involved in astrakhan fur trade business. He was promoted to deputy director when he was 19 years old. Isaac got infected with "Malta fever", a terrible disease in Middle Asia. He had fever and he was so dizzy and weak that he could hardly move. At that time there was no cure from this disease, but he survived.

When he recovered Isaac returned to Kiev and got a job at the office involved in the paper trade business. He was deputy manager and then became manager. In 1938 he married a Jewish woman from a very religious family. Her name was Tsyupa. In 1929 their son Marek was born. Their son Dania was born in 1937 and their younger daughter Rina was born in 1939. Isaac was summoned to the army in the first days of the war in 1941. He was sent to the Kiev food supplies center. In the first months of the war this center was near the front, but after half of its stuff was killed or wounded at the Gotiy station, it was transferred to the Gorky station in Russia. He served there until the beginning of 1946. Isaac's wife and their children and parents were in the evacuation in Tashkent. My mother's younger sister and Isaac's wife lived in Tashkent at that time. My wife's parents kept Jewish traditions. They went to the synagogue and celebrated Sabbath.

I know little about my father Abraham Minevich. He was born in 1909. He went to cheder at 6 like all other boys of his age. He finished school in Kiev and worked in an office in Kiev. He was very kind and loved my mother, my brother and me very much. That's what I remember from my childhood.

I don't know anything about my great grandparents on my mother's side. I have no information about my mother's father either. All I know is that his name was Ziama Kolchinskiy and that he died in 1917.

My grandmother Malka Kolchinskaya, nee Belskaya, was born in 1880s. I don't know her place of birth. After the revolution of 1917 she was working at the kindergarten. Once there was a water leakage in the basement of the kindergarten and my grandmother stood in the cold water scooping it out. She caught cold and became deaf. Communication with her was next to impossible. She didn't tell anything about herself and we couldn't ask her. That is why we don't know anything about her. She was a very kind woman and loved my brother and me very much. She didn't

observe any religious traditions. She wore plain clothes.

My grandmother had a brother. His name was Motia. Motia Belskiy was born in 1987. He and his family lived in Yalta. He died in 1979. That's all I know about him.

My grandmother and grandfather had two children: her daughter Dvoira (Vera), my mother, and son Moisey (Mikhail).

My mother's brother Mikhail was born in 1910. He finished a secondary school in Kiev. Some time before the Great Patriotic War he married a non-Jewish woman. When the war began he happened to be in a village in Kiev region. He failed to go to the evacuation and stayed under occupation. He managed to obtain the documents where his identity was written as non-Jewish. He survived hiding from Germans. Later he went to a partisan unit. After the war he got christened and avoided any contacts with Jews. He was named Moisey at birth, but he was called a Russian name Mikhail Kolchinskiy.

After the war he worked as freight forwarder at the company where many employees were Jewish. They discussed him in Yiddish and blamed him for his conduct. He understood everything they were saying, but he never gave up that he understood. He tried to avoid any contacts with his relatives. He never came to our house. We invited him only once - to the funeral of his mother Malka in 1962. He came grumbling why we called him. This was the last time we saw him.

I remember his wife calling us once. She asked me to come immediately. I went to her, although it was quite a distance from where we lived. She told me that Mikhail had died a couple of years before. A Christian priest read the burial service for him. His wife was very ill when I saw her. She had asthma after blood transfusion. She called me to ask me to bring her medications from the pharmacy. She explained to me where the pharmacy was located and I was surprised that it was so far from where she lived. I brought her what she needed and asked her why it was necessary to go so far away when there were pharmacies near her house. She said that there were Jews working in the nearer pharmacies and that she was afraid to buy medications from them fearing that they could poison her. This happened in the middle 1970s. I was shocked that this was said by the woman that had lived her life with a Jewish husband. I gave her the medications and left saying nothing.

My mother Dvoira (Vera) Minevich, nee Kolchinskaya, was born in Genichesk, Kherson region, in 1912. She finished a Russian secondary school in 1927. I don't know how my mother turned out to be in Kiev or how she met my father. They got married in 1934. I've never heard them recalling any wedding or a big party. I think they had a civil ceremony and no celebration.

Growing up

I was born in Kiev in 1935. My first childhood memory is of me sitting on the windowsill licking the window glass. The door opens to let my father in. My mother is sitting on the bed. I also remember where the door is. My father comes closer to me telling me that it is not good to lick the glass and that it is very bad, actually. After he finishes I keep licking. I remember him saying "We have quite a child, don't we?" meaning my stubbornness and strong character.

After many years passed I asked my mother where it was. She was amazed that I remembered. She said I was less than 2 years old then. I told mother where the bed and the door were.

My brother Marek was born in 1937. My father earned well and the family was wealthy. In 1939 Western Ukraine joined the USSR and my father was offered a position of store director. We moved to Lvov. My mother was a housewife before the war. We had a housemaid as well. When we arrived in Lvov we got accommodation at a communal apartment. A Polish family was living there. I remember beautiful furniture and carpets in the apartment. They had 14 year old twins: Marek and Tolek. They were my very good friends.

During the war

I remember how the *war began*⁵ in 1941. Lvov was bombed. My mother's distant relative Basia lived in Lvov. Basia got married at 16. Her husband Grigory Gussak was a non-Jew. In 1941 Basia turned 20 and had two children already. Her husband had a very high position. Basia's husband was summoned to the front on the first days of the war. He managed to send Basia to Kiev by train. My mother convinced Basia to take me with them. My parents and my younger brother who was 3 years old headed to Kiev on foot. They sometimes got a lift on a cart, but they walked most of the time.

I remember that we were moving very slowly. The trip took us four weeks. We stopped on the way. During air raids we jumped off the train to hide. We reached Kiev. I remember my parents coming to the apartment where we were staying to take me with them. Basia was lying on the bed. She lifted the sheet and I saw black blemishes on her skin caused by the stress. Basia's husband perished defending Lvov soon afterwards. Basia survived and raised her two children. She died in Kiev in 1980s. Her younger son lives in Kiev. Her older son ruined himself with drinking. I don't know when he died.

My father, mother, my mother's mother, my younger brother and I moved on to Russia. Ukraine was occupied at that time and going to Russia was the only direction we could take. We arrived at Ivanovka village, Sorochinskiy district, Orenburg region. We rented a room from a very nice older couple. My father was summoned to the army. The military didn't summon him from Kiev because he had jaundice. My mother showed me the photographs of my father, but I called any man on a photo wearing a military uniform "Papa". My father perished on the front at Balagoye station, Russia, in 1942. I have never been there, but I hope I will be able to go there one day.

In 1942 I turned 7 and I went to school in Ivanovka. It was an ordinary school and the only one existing in this village. Children went to school at 8, but I went to school myself, sat at the desk and began to attend school. My mother didn't mind. My mother worked very hard in the evacuation. She was a cart driver. She transported firewood on her cart.

My mother fell seriously ill in winter 1942. She got lung hemorrhage in the woods and when she reached the village she was taken to hospital located in the district town. On that same day my brother and I were sent to the children's home in this village, because our deaf grandmother couldn't take care of us. I studied at school. My brother didn't go to school. He was too young at first, but when he reached 8 to go to school he couldn't, because he didn't have winter clothes. My brother went to school at 9. I don't remember any anti-Semitism. We spent 4 years at the

children's home and were treated nicely all this time. Our grandmother came to visit us. She was working as a cleaning woman somewhere.

My mother had tuberculosis and stayed in hospital. I remember myself crying a lot calling my mother. This is all I remember about the children's home. After the war my father's brother Isaac took every effort to take us to Kiev. My mother was in the tuberculosis hospital in Moscow at that time. My father's brother David was helping her in Moscow. He was a military doctor in hospital. He watched over her until 1947 until my mother's recovery. He sent her to a very good closed sanatorium for higher Party officials.

After the war

In 1946 my uncle Isaac came to Orenburg region to take us to Kiev. My grandmother Malka lived with her son Mikhail and his wife in Kiev. We moved in with uncle Isaac. He lived in a two-storied wooden house in the suburbs of Kiev. Isaac had three children. The owner of this house was an 80 years old man. He bought it in 1885 when he was a bread dealer. We were renting one room on the 2nd floor facing the street with a streetcar rail track and a small kitchen with a big stove that occupied most of the space. There was a small window in the kitchen. There was a veranda at the entrance to our apartment. There was a primus stove and buckets with water on the veranda. It was always cold and damp in the apartment. The stove didn't help.

I was responsible for fetching water from our neighbor's well. Our neighbors were very nice. I guess, they were Jews, but I can't say for sure, because I don't remember them that well. I carried two buckets on the shoulder-yoke. I was short and the buckets were big and heavy. Passers by often helped, feeling sorry for me.

My uncle held a high official post and provided well for his family. He was Deputy director of a big office, involved in sales of paper. His wife was a typist in a store. My brother and I went to school. I became a pioneer.

I was a very sociable girl. My uncle and his wife thought I didn't behave myself. I grew up in the children's home and didn't quite fit in a wealthy family. I invited my friends and we had fun jumping from the wardrobe and played with china elephants. It was very much in fashion to put little elephants on a piece of furniture. They were sold in sets: from a bigger one to the smallest little elephant. The biggest of them was the size of a match box. They were very expensive elephants made from ivory. They were brought from India. Once my aunt was dusting and found out that the elephants were losing their trunks and tails and that those were glued together with bread. There was a terrible scandal. Jam was continuously vanishing from the house. Isaac's wife arranged a real interrogation for us kids upon returning home from work and discovering the disappearance of jam. We all said that we didn't take anything. I still don't know who it was. I was sure that it wasn't me.

I always invited my friends to the house. I shared everything I had with my friends as I used to do at the children's home. I got along very well with my classmates. Uncle Isaac's children were arrogant with us. They were jealous about their parents' attitude towards us and were very angry when they were buying us something little. Once Isaac's wife took me to a dressmaker and she made me a beautiful dress. Isaac's daughter Rina made a scandal. Isaac's family was much

wealthier than the majority of families. There were gangs of thieves in Kiev. My uncle and his wife were very much afraid of the possibility that thieves might break into the house. I didn't care about such fears and used to leave the key under a welcome rug writing a note for my brother on the door in huge letters "Marek, the key is under the rug".

We lived in this family for a year and then Isaac's wife took my brother and me back to the children's home. I lived there until 1948. We were well fed in Isaac's family, but in the children's home we understood what it was like to be hungry. My brother was a sickly child. There were 5 or 6 children that needed a special diet and my brother was one of them. These children got one egg and a lump of sugar per week. Other children didn't get any eggs. We got porridge and soup with a slice of bread. One could exchange anything for a piece of bread. There was no supporting personnel in the children's home. We took turns to do work in the kitchen or clean the toilets.

I was chairman of the children's council at the children's home. The children liked me a lot. I wasn't aggressive and tried to have friendly relationships with other children. It was my duty to appoint children to be on duty. I tried to form teams justly and to take no advantage of my position. I always chose most unattractive duties like cleaning the toilet, for example. But I didn't like cleaning the toilets and I gave 2 slices of bread to those who agreed to do it for me.

The boys were always hungry. I remember my grandmother Malka visiting us at the children's home. She used to bring a piece of bread with her and it was a wonderful gift. Nobody else visited us. This children's home housed children of school age, but there was no school in it and we went to school #61 in the city. There was no anti-Semitism in my class or at school. I had several Jewish and non-Jewish friends. My friends used to visit me later, when I studied at the trade school. I had to learn a profession and left school after I finished the lower secondary school. My classmates invited me to their prom after they finished higher secondary school. We still call one another. Our tutor at the children's home loved me very much and always tried to give me a hug. There were Tatar, Ukrainian and Russian children in the children's home. We were all children of the war and there was no national segregation between us. When I grew up I learned to tell the people's nationality. I came to understanding that people had a nationality and learned about nationalities. On holidays and weekends we were allowed to visit our relatives. We always visited our uncle Isaac. They met us nicely and treated us to a meal, but never gave us anything to take with us. But I still loved them dearly. I had no bad feelings about them sending us to the children's home. I felt all right there and so did my brother, I guess.

At 14 I went to the dressmaking trade school. Trade schools were established in 1945. Students could complete their secondary education and get professional education. I got hot meals and a stipend of 75 rubles in this school. We also got food packages for weekends. I rented a room and I had to pay 100 rubles per month. I gave my landlady my stipend and sewed for her or her relatives for the remaining 25 rubles. Some of my schoolmates were girls from the country. They shared the food they got from home with me. My mother returned to Kiev in 1949 and lived in the hairdresser's where she worked. We didn't get our apartment back. A big family was living there. They told the authorities that we had gone to the Babiy Yar⁶ to obtain permission to move into our apartment.

In 1951 we, (my mother, my grandmother Malka and I) received a room in the communal apartment on the 4th floor in Turovskaya street, Podol. At first there were 3 of us residing in this

apartment: my mother, my grandmother Malka and I. After the academic year at school was over we took my brother Marek from the children's home. He has had a dramatic life. He studied well at school. He was older than his classmates and felt very unhappy about it. After school he was called up to the army. We don't know what happened to him there. He has always had weak health. Marek returned from the army and went to work at the plant. But he couldn't work. He began to behave in a weird way. We had to take him to a psychiatrist. He told us that Marek was ill and sent him to the mental hospital. When he was younger and when our mother was alive we took him home from hospital. Now he stays there permanently. I visit him twice a week. He has schizophrenia. If he stops taking special medications he becomes violent. He breaks windows and attacks people with a knife.

I studied at the trade school to get a profession and in the evening school to complete my secondary education. I finished this evening school with a gold medal in 1951. In 1951 - 1952 I worked as a dressmaker in a shop in Kiev. In 1952 I tried to enter the Institute of Light Industry. This was the first time I faced anti-Semitism, although I didn't quite understand what it was about. I didn't have to take any exams, because I had a gold medal. They told me at the Institute that I failed to pass the competition of medallists. This was not true. All medallists were admitted without exams. I submitted my documents to the Institute of Food Industry and got the same response. There was an Institute of Silicates left where there was a shortage of students. I entered it in 1952. In 1953 this Institute became a Faculty of Kiev Polytechnic Institute. In this way I became a student of one of the most prestigious institutes in Kiev. Kiev Polytechnic Institute is still very prestigious. It gives very strong technical knowledge to its students. In 1954 we moved into another communal apartment in Artyom street in the central part of Kiev where we received two rooms. Uncle Isaac gave us money to move into this apartment.

Matus and Riva Strizhevskiy, the parents of my aunt Tsyupa (my uncle Isaac's wife) played a very special role in my life. Before the war they were living in a small house in the outskirts of Kiev. When they returned from evacuation they found their house destroyed during the war. They received a small apartment in Chokolovka, a distant neighborhood in Kiev. My aunt's parents were very religious. I visited them for the first time when I was ten years old after I returned to Kiev after the war. I saw my grandfather Matus put on his ritualistic clothing: little boxes on his head (tfilin) and striped cloth (thalesz). I heard him praying. I understood that they belonged to a different world. I wish I had paid more attention to such things. But at that time such was my understanding that they belonged to the outdated world and I took no interest in them. They were very patient and wise in their attitude towards non-religious people. I visited them at Pesach every year. I usually came in the evening after work.

They had many books in the language that I didn't know. Now I understand that they were religious books in Yiddish. Many of these books were given to them by my uncle Isaac. Many of them were found in the attics of the houses where Jews had been living before the war.

I have one of the brightest memories of Seder diner at Pesach in this family in the middle 1950s. I was there and so was Isaac and his family and other relatives. Grandfather Matus sat ceremoniously at the head of the table. He said a prayer and we all drank some wine. It was a long ritual according to all rules. There was a big book on the table in front of my grandfather. He read an excerpt from it and we had to take a bite of greens or an onion or something else. Then they

ceremoniously removed a beautiful cloth from the dish with matzah. Then we ate delicious dinner. I remember chicken broth with matzah and kosher chicken. Their daughter (my aunt Tsypa) bought chicken at the market and went to Podol⁷ where it was still possible to find a shoihet to slaughter the chicken. Matus and Riva would have rather refused from food than have something non-kosher. They kept kitchen utensils for meat and dairy products separately in their house. They had special dishes for Pesach. There was no bread in this house at Pesach. They checked and cleaned everything before Pesach.

My aunt Tsyupa's parents, Matus and Riva Strizhevskiy didn't like the Soviet power. They called Party officials "these bandits". I spent every Pesach with them before grandfather Matus died in 1958. They sent me an invitation through Isaac. I didn't go to his funeral because I was ill at that time. I know that he was buried according to the Jewish tradition, but I don't know where. Riva died in the early 1960s. She was buried according to the Jewish tradition as well. There was no coffin. A rabbi from the synagogue in Schekavitskaya street (the only functioning synagogue even during the most difficult times) was at the funeral to say the prayer. Now I look after Riva's grave. I failed to find the grave of grandfather Matus.

Riva and Matus had 3 children: son Itzyk and two daughters - Tsyupa and Haya. Itzyk perished at the front in 1942. He was first lieutenant. That's all I know about him.

Tsyupa was born in 1907. She finished a secondary school. She married my father's brother Isaac in 1929. She worked as a typist and a secretary in various offices.

Their younger daughter Haya was born in 1910. She finished a secondary school. In the late 1930s Isaac and his wife Tsyupa went to Bukhara in the Middle Asia to earn some money. Haya visited them there and met a young man. His name was Roman Rudakov. He wasn't a Jew. He was a secretary of the Komsomol unit at an enterprise. Haya got married and stayed in Bukhara. His religious parents repudiated their daughter for marrying a man of different faith and a communist. In 1942 her mother and father and her sister Tsyupa evacuated to Tashkent. Roman got a higher position in Tashkent and he and his wife were residing there at that time. Only when they were living together Haya's parents understood that their daughter had married a nice man and that he had done everything to help them and accepted the fact that he was not a Jew. After the war Haya and her family moved to Moscow. Roman got a promotion to Moscow. They lived a beautiful life, raised their children and died in Moscow in the late 1990s. Their children were not raised Jewish. Their nationality is written as Russian in their passports.

Uncle Isaac had a great influence on me. He was so shocked by extermination of Jews in Kiev and other locations during Holocaust that he decided to dedicate his life to saving the memory and culture of these people. This occurred to him in one of his business trips to a small town near Kiev. He came into the yard of a local farmer (he wasn't a Jew) and froze: the old man was sitting on the bench in the yard cutting tiny pieces from the scroll of Torah to upholster the inside of a big box with them. My uncle forgot all about why he came to this man and jumped on this man yelling at him "What are you doing?" He explained to the old man about the scroll and the man gave all pieces to my uncle. My uncle gave the Torah to the synagogue in Kiev and they buried it according to the tradition because it was damaged.

At that moment Isaac understood that it was his duty to find and buy such miraculously preserved pieces from people and save them in the memory of those who perished during the Holocaust. He began to collect pieces of Jewish art. When he saw a book of prayers or a Jewish picture that was sold at the market he asked the vendors where they got those. They usually replied "There was Jewish family living in our apartment before the war. They perished and this is what was left". In many years my uncle collected many pictures, engravings, dishes, mezuzas, etc. He often went to small Ukrainian towns on business and brought many pieces from there. He kept and restored them. Every piece had a history of its own and my uncle remembered every single story. This became the essence of his life. His apartment was full of these pieces. He was writing a book. It was entitled "Collection" and contained description of many pieces from his collection.

My uncle's wife didn't support her husband. She made scenes after he brought every new piece into their apartment and his daughters was always mad that her father was buying junk instead buying new clothes for her. My aunt understood how dangerous it was to keep such collection at the height of anti-Semitism (my uncle started his collection in 1948 at the very height of anti-Semitic campaign), when a person could be arrested even if the authorities found a little book in Yiddish at home. She was afraid for her husband and children. Besides, she was a very cleanly lady, and all these pieces were very dusty and she had to spend her time trying to clean them. My uncle was hoping that his children would support him, but none of them took any interest in them. He was alone with his hobby.

New In the middle of 1960s my uncle was summoned to the KB office several times. He understood that he might be arrested and he stopped to collect things openly. However, these calls had nothing to do with his collection. He was called to the KGB office because they had found his phone number in one of their suspects' notebook. This suspect was charged for theft, but my uncle couldn't even remember his name at first. However, he got frightened for his family. It was the time when collection of the Jewish cult pieces could lead to no good, because even for things of less importance people could vanish in Stalin's camps and prisons.

Isaac was a member of the Communist Party, but he knew what the Soviet power was like and this caused him a lot of suffering. He was writing a book, but he was afraid that somebody would read this book. He was writing it avoiding direct language. He understood that if he was going to be arrested and the authorities got this book he would be charged additionally for writing what he thought. (The manuscript of this book has been preserved. The book is prepared for publication in the Institute of Judaism in Kiev). This book is about my uncle's collection, destruction and plunder of the Jewish heritage after the war. When my uncle and his wife were alone and my uncle wanted to speak his wife would say "quiet, the walls have ears". Stalin's death in 1953 was a holiday for this family.

I was far from policy at that time, but Stalin's death was a big shock for me and I even cried a little. I had a friend. She was a Jewish girl named Greta. I often visited her at home in 1950s. They had many interesting books and many interesting people were coming to them. They spoke about Stalin, about Jews and their life and about Israel. Only then I came to understanding that many things we read in newspapers or heard on the radio were lies. I turned into a dissident in my heart.

I graduated the Institute in 1957. My profession was Mechanical engineer. I got a job assignment at the brick factory in Daugeliay, Lithuania. I worked there for a year. I could not get adjusted to the

climate. I was often ill and began to cough with hemoptysis. I came to Kiev with the diagnosis “tuberculosis”. I stayed in tuberculosis hospital for half a year. They didn’t confirm the diagnosis, but they discovered bronchiectasia. I was severely ill and had a surgery in 1960. I had a lobe of a lung removed. After I got a little better I decided to take to yoga. My condition improved significantly and I feel no different from other people.

I lived with my mother all this time and worked at the Giprochlor design institute as a mechanical engineer. It was very difficult for a Jew to find a job in Kiev at that time. I was lucky. When I came to this institute looking for a job it was an affiliate of a big Russian institute in Dzerzhynsk near Gorky. Its management wasn’t anti-Semitic and didn’t report to the Ukrainian Communist Party district committee. Ukrainian party committees were watching the percentage of Jewish employees not to exceed 5 % very strictly. And the management of this institute was interested in qualified employees. They employed many Jews that couldn’t find a job anywhere else. I remember very well how the human resources manager in Kiev processing my employment documents on the basis of an order from Dzerzhynsk murmured wickedly “Uh, this Haimovich team” (Haimovich was a popular Jewish last name; it was used as curse).

In 1963 I married Vitaliy Polisskiy, a Jew. We met when we were students at the Institute. He had graduated from the Polytechnic Institute few years before me.

My husband was born to the religious family of David and Revekka Polisskiy. My husband’s father was professor of political sciences in Kiev Conservatoire. He had graduated from the Institute of red professors in Moscow. He perished during the Great patriotic War. That is all I know about him.

My husband’s mother Revekka Polisskaya was born in Kiev in 1905. She finished a secondary school in Kiev and graduated from Kiev Polytechnic Institute. From 1941 to 1944 she was in the evacuation in the town of Michurinsk, Kuibyshev region, with her son Vitaliy. After she returned from the evacuation she worked at the repair base in Kiev and then she got a job of an instructor at Kiev Polytechnic Institute. She conducted laboratory works in chemistry at the technological faculty. After the war they lived in a small room in the communal apartment in Turgenevskaya street until she received an apartment some time later. Vitaliy’s mother dedicated all her life to the Communist Party. She always conducted political classes and was a chairman at the election centers. On the 50th anniversary of her Party membership (she became a member in 1942, and the 50th anniversary was in 1992 – the year of “perestroika”) she said sadly “Nobody remembers that today is the 50th anniversary of my membership in the Party” and my husband replied “it’s better that they do not remember. If they did they might beat you”. It was kind of a sad joke. The Communist party was not popular at that time. She died in 1995.

Vitaliy was born in Kiev in 1933. He finished a secondary school in Kiev and then Kiev Polytechnic Institute. When we met he was working as a mechanical engineer at one of design institutes in Kiev. He was fond of photographing. He had his photographs displayed at exhibitions. When we got married and he moved into our apartment in Artyom street he brought his books, his photo accessories and photographs. We couldn’t afford a wedding party. We invited few of our friends and had a small party with them talking about books and music. My husband is a very interesting and intelligent man.

We read a lot, including underground publications of *Bulgakov*⁸ and *Solzhenitsyn*⁹ that were forbidden by the Soviet censorship. We were interested in all world news. We listened to Western radios to hear the truth about Israel, trying to understand the real situation there. We often had gatherings with friends at home. We celebrated birthdays and Soviet holidays. We were discussing the latest news and shared our impressions about the books we read. We liked New Year celebrations. On the Soviet holidays we got together with friends to go out of town or just stayed at home. My husband or I had never been members of the Communist Party. We went to parades, because it was mandatory to go there. One might have problems for missing a demonstration (a reprimand at work or even dismissal).

My father's mother Riva stayed with us every summer. Her son Isaac had a house in the country. My grandmother was too old to go to the country and she moved in with us for the summer. My grandmother Riva was very religious. She always celebrated Sabbath. She had candles and she had special books (editor note: the interviewee is talking about a *luah*, a Jewish calendar) at home (she got them from her son Isaac) to read about the dates of holidays and the time of lighting candles. She never ate non-kosher meat. While Tsyupa's parents, Riva and Matus Strizhevskiye were alive they always sent her a piece of kosher chicken for a holiday. If she didn't have a piece of kosher meat she didn't eat meat at all. When my grandmother was staying with us our life was like a war. Grandmother didn't allow us to cut sausage and butter with the same knife or eat meat and dairy products together. She had separate dishes for meat and milky products. She had her own pot for her cereal with milk at our home. We had a very vague idea of all these things and we just believed that she was behind time and that all she demanded was vestige of the past. We didn't quite appreciate her demands. I was already married when grandmother was staying with us for the last time. She was eager to meet a woman with whom she could speak Yiddish. She couldn't do it with Isaac or his wife. All their neighbors were Russian. She dreamed that I would take her out into a small park where she would meet a woman that could speak Yiddish. But it happened differently. She met a Jewish man. She was 97. She used to say about him "He is a very nice man. Only he is so young". He was 87 years old. She could hardly walk.

We lived on the 3rd floor. I used to take her downstairs and then to a bench in the street. When there were few steps left to get to the bench she used to push my hand away and say "I can do it myself. I am really tired of this granddaughter of mine". She told about these outings "They all gossip around us and we recall old songs". Grandmother used to write songs in Yiddish when she was young. She said that all her family sang these songs. This man began to sing a song and my grandmother said "I wrote this song. Our neighborhood used to sing this song, but this man comes from a different neighborhood, but he knows the song".

Grandmother was an interesting woman. She would say "I'm not wearing this sweater today. He might think I have nothing else to wear. I'll have this shawl instead". She was very careful about how she looked even at this age in this country! My grandmother hated the Soviet power. She used to say "How dare they kill people only because they are rich. Poor people are poor because they are lazy". At the end of summer my grandmother returned to her apartment. When I visited her she asked "Did you see him? Is he still there?" about the man she had met. I didn't see him, I just didn't go past this spot. In half a year grandmother said all of a sudden that her time came. She stopped eating. She died on the first day of Pesach in 1970. Her son Isaac invite an acolyte from the synagogue and he said "She is a saint. Grandmother died on the 100th birthday anniversary of

Lenin in 1970“ She was buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions. She had the *Kaddish* said and she was buried without a coffin, just wrapped in a piece of cloth. I look after her grave. I don't plant flowers there, but they grow somehow.

My mother never spoke about her attitude towards the Soviet power. She was far from such issues of general character. She lived in her routinely world. She didn't have any education.. She always spoke in a polite manner and her colleagues at the hairdresser's used to say “You talk quite like a teacher”. She judged people from their manner to wear clothes or from how they looked. My mother was very unhappy looking at me. I didn't have manicure and didn't like hairdos. My mother used to say that “she is not a girl, she is a boy” about me. Mother died in 1983. She was very ill and I stayed with her all the time before she died.

In 1964 our son Anton was born. We were far from religion and didn't observe any Jewish traditions. Our son wasn't raised Jewish. He was a very sickly boy. He had bronchial asthma in his childhood. We didn't take him to doctors. We understood that there were no medications that could help. We involved him in sport activities: played badminton and skied in winter. And we won the disease. He was a talented boy. He studied at the mathematical school and finished it very successfully. In 1981 he passed exams and entered one of the most prestigious institutes in the country: Moscow Applied Physics Institute. He graduated in 1987. He was one of the most successful students and he remained at the Institute for a post-graduate course. At 28 he became a Candidate of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. He worked in England and Switzerland. In 1994 Anton had to quit science due to poor financing. Now he works in the sphere of computer technologies. He married and very intelligent Armenian woman. They have two daughters: Rita and Karina. Rita is 11 (born in 1991) and Karina is 1 year old (born in 2001). They live in Moscow. We are very proud of our son.

In the 1970s many of our friends and acquaintances were moving to the US and Israel. We didn't dare to go with our sickly son. Besides, our parents would not have accepted this. And we couldn't leave them.

I have always been near Tsyupa and uncle Isaac. Their older son Marek fell ill and died in the early 1970s. Their son Dania and daughter Rina and their families moved to the US in the early 1980s. In few years Dania and his wife got in a car accident. His wife died and Dania is in a special hospital. He doesn't recognize anyone, doesn't remember and cannot move. In 1983 my uncle died and his wife said that everything associated with him was very dear for her meaning his collection. But this was a different time and there was no fear of an arrest. Tsyupa lives in America now with her daughter and granddaughter. She gave my uncle collection to the people that had helped her to prepare all necessary documentation for the departure. I don't know what happened to the collection. I guess it might have been sold out.

I used to visit Tsyupa, Isaac's wife, before she left. I loved her. She said to me before she left “There is one thing in my life I am sorry about - that is that I sent you to the children's home”. I replied that it was all right with me. I didn't mind it and I liked it at the children's home.

My husband and I worked as engineers at the institute. In 1990 I retired and my husband retired in 1994. We lead a very active life. We go to theaters and concerts. We celebrate our birthdays with our Jewish and non-Jewish friends.

Many things have changed in our life. Jewish life has been restored. We are very interested in everything that has to do with the Jewish way of life. We have learned so much about Israel. We have many friends there. We keep in touch with them. We attend Jewish events and receive food packages and medication in the Hesed. We shall not move to Israel, because our son is staying here. We cannot leave them and we love our granddaughters. We often go to visit them in Moscow. I take care of my health: walk in the woods on Sunday and swim in the Dnieper in any weather. This helps me to remain in good condition and to be able to help other people.

Glossary

- 1 Petliura Simon(1879-1926) , Ukrainian politician. Member Ukrainian social-democratic working party; In soviet-polish war has emerged on the side of Poland; in 1920 emigrated. Kill In Paris from the revenge for Jewish pogroms on the Ukraine.
- 2 In 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.
- 3 The majority of wealthy farmers that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to the Soviet power were declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.
- 4 Freight railcars were not meant for the transportation of people. They were not heated and there were no seats in them. In those years they were used for transportation of prisoners.
- 5 On 22 June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring a war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War.
- 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. During 3 years of occupation (1941-1943) fascists were killing thousands of people at the Babiy Yar every day: communists, partisans, prisoners of war. They were people of different nationalities.
- 7 Podol has always been seen as the Jewish region of Kiev. Before the war 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.
- 8**Bulgakov, Mikhail** Born on 15 May, new style 1891 in Kiev, the eldest son of a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy. Russian writer that described tragic collisions of the Civil War of 1914-1922. Many of his works were not published while he was alive. In his works he developed the idea of the never-ending confrontation of moral and creative forces with the evil.
- 9 **Solzhenitsyn Alexandr**, Russian novelist and historian, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1970 and was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974. In 1945 he was arrested for writing a letter in which he criticized Joseph Stalin and spent eight years in prisons and labor camps, after which he spent three more years in enforced exile. Rehabilitated in 1956. The Gulag Archipelago is Solzhenitsyn's attempt to compile a literary-historical record of the vast system of prisons and labour camps that came into being shortly after the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia (1917) and that underwent an enormous expansion during the rule of Stalin (1924-53). In 1974 Solzhenitsyn was exiled from the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn's Soviet citizenship was officially restored in 1990. He ended his exile and returned to Russia in 1994.

