Evgenia Wainshtock Biography

Evgenia Wainshtock
Kiev
Ukraine
Interviewer: Oksana Kuntsevskaya

Evgenia Wainshtock is a short 71-year old woman looking older. She lives with her daughter and granddaughter in 3-room apartment near the center of the town. Evgenia's daughter is divorced and Evgenia has to work, because her daughter cannot provide for their family. She also does all housework and shopping. Evgenia is not very happy about their situation, but she is a cheerful person. She enjoys being interviewed although she has refused to answer some questions.

I was born in Kiev on 27 September 1931.

My grandmother on my mother's side Riva-Haika Haitina, nee Gershovich, was born in Kiev in late 1870s. She didn't have any education, but she could read and write and knew many prayers by heart. I have no information about her family. All I know is that her parents lived in Mikhailovskaya Street (Editor's note: center of Kiev).

My grandmother had a younger sister Deborah. She finished grammar school with a gold medal before the revolution of 1917 and entered Medical Institute. She became a physician. My grandmother got married in 1899 and her sister stayed at their parents' apartment - I don't know whether their parents were alive at that time or not. I remember this apartment. It seemed huge and luxurious to me.

There were two rooms,to enter one of them there were few stairs. I remember an old carved cupboard and a round table in the middle of one room with some chairs around it. There were two nickel-plated beds in another room and something else. Deborah married Lev Shorokh, a Jewish young man. He was chief accountant at a company. He was a very handsome and intelligent man. They had a housewife, a Jewish woman. They didn't have any children. My aunt was a physician at the clinic in Basseynaya Street before and after the war. Se often came for lunch to us. By the way, aunt Deborah didn't change her last name after she got married. I don't where she and her husband were in evacuation. After the war I often came to see my aunt.

I studied at the Institute and had to do homework in German. My German was very poor and my aunt had a very good conduct of German and helped me to do my tasks. She died in 1952. Her husband married a Russian woman that had a child after my aunt died. He died in 1965. As far as I remember Deborah and her husband didn't observe any Jewish traditions and didn't go to synagogue.

My grandfather on my mother's side Mordukh Haitin, born in 1875, came from the Baltic republics or Byelorussia. I have no information about his parents. He was a tailor. He was very professional and owned a shop (until mid 1920s). After his shop was expropriated he got a job at the tailor shop of Kiev military division.

My grandfather had three brothers: Aaron, Gregory and Ilia. I don't know their dates of birth. They were revolutionaries and continuously protested against the tsarist regime. They were arrested and exiled to Siberia. A police officer on duty often used to come to their home asking whether they were writing letters to Siberia. He often searched the apartment to cause as much trouble as possible. My mother's younger sister Sarah got very upset when the apartment turned into a mess. My grandfather preferred to bribe this officer giving him one ruble that was a lot of money at the beginning of XX century. My mother said that my grandmother could feed the whole family for 3 days for this money.

But the family understood that my grandfather's brothers escaped from exile. We began to receive parcels from them from abroad after the revolution of 1917. When Stalin came to power (late 1920s) grandfather's brothers stopped sending parcels. They probably didn't want to put their relatives at risk (Editor's note: The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his relatives abroad and charge him with espionage, send to concentration camp or even sentence to death.). I tried to find them through the Red Cross later, but failed. Sarah's husband told me that grandfather's brothers lived in Boston, but I don't know where he got this information.

I have no information about when my grandparents got married. They had five children: Sarah, born in 1900, 3 sons - my grandfather named them after his brothers - Aaron (1902), Gregory (1904) and Ilia (1906) and my mother Leibe born in 1908. My grandmother was a housewife. My grandparents rented a two-room apartment in a two-storied building in Bessarabka. The house was very solid -when a construction company took an effort to remove it in 1950s they failed and had to blast the foundations. There was my grandmother's bed in a bigger room, a sofa where I slept, my parents' bed, a cupboard and a table. There was a hallway with a wardrobe -my mother said that my grandfather also slept in the hallway. Another room -a smaller one- was given to my mother's brother Gregory and his wife Tatiana. My grandfather kept a housemaid. There was little space in this apartment, but nobody seemed to care much about it.

There was a kerosene storehouse and a shoihet in the yard. We had Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish neighbors. They all and the non-Jews too took their chicken to the shoihet to get them slaughtered. Neighbors got along well with one another. Also other Jews from nearby streets came to this shoihet.

There were many books by Russian and foreign writers at my grandparents' home. All members of the family were fond of reading newspapers -especially "Pravda". One day in 1920s Aaron came home from work, sat at the table and began to read a newspaper. Grandmother served his dinner and he ate it without noticing. Grandmother cleaned up the table and then he finally raised his eyes from the newspaper asking her "how about dinner, Mother?"

My grandfather sympathized with Bolsheviks. If I said "God, it is going to rain" before 1 May or 8 March he replied "Don't you worry. Bolsheviks are lucky and will enjoy good weather!". My grandfather told me about oppression of Jews in old times. He said how groups of men on Palm Day used to beat Jews with willow tree branches before the revolution. He didn't tell me anything about pogroms.

My grandparents were very religious and observed all Jewish traditions. My grandfather went to synagogue regularly. He had a thales and book of prayers and prayed at home every day with his

tefillin on. My mother told me that my grandmother put on a black gown, a shawl and a thick gold chain, her wedding gift, before going to synagogue every Saturday. My grandfather had a seat of his own at Brodsky synagogue. After the war grandfather went to synagogue at Podol. Their children were not religious and didn't go to synagogue. In 1930s religious people were persecuted. At Pesach all children and their families got together at the table in their parents' home. At Pesach my grandparents used special fancy dishes and table sets. I remember potatoes with prunes – I couldn't stand the smell of them. There was matsah at Pesach. My grandparents talked in Yiddish. My grandfather spoke good Yiddish while my grandmother spoke a mixture of Yiddish, Ukrainian and Russian. My grandfather spoke Russian with his customers. My grandfather was a very professional tailor, but he drank, unfortunately. My grandfather worked as a tailor before the revolution of 1917. Between 1930s – 1941 he made clothes for commanding officers of Kiev military division.

My mother's older sister Sarah Kudrevitskaya (nee Haitina) was born in 1900. I don't know what kind of education she got. She was fanatically cleanly. My mother told me that she would wash the floors so clean that they were shining like an egg's yoke. Then the boys, her younger brothers, would try to get into the house through a window and she would slap them on their hands with her brush. Sarah married Wolf Kudrevitskiy, a Jew. He was a very handsome man. He was a specialist in manufactured goods. Sarah was a housewife. Before the war she got a job at the KINAP plant as a worker. They were very dramatically poor. They lived in a very small room in a communal apartment. Uncle worked at a manufactured goods storeroom, but he never took any advantage of his position. Many people were stealing to survive at that time, but uncle was a decent and honest man. His miserable salary was hardly enough to make ends meet. They had two daughters: Dina, born in 1925 and Evgenia, born in 1933. Dina and Evgenia finished Russian secondary school and graduated from Kiev Medical University. They became doctors. They didn't observe any Jewish traditions and the girls grew up to be atheists. Both the daughters married military men and followed them to Yoshkar-Ola (over 3000 km from Kiev) in 1950s. After her husband died in 1960s, Sarah moved to her daughters in Yoshkar-Ola. She died in 1980. Sarah's older daughter Evgenia and her family moved to Israel from Yoshkar-Ola, and Dina, her daughter and granddaughter continued living in Yoshkar-Ola.

I know very little about my mother's brother Aron Haitin, born in 1902. My mother told me that he had a wife that died before the war. They didn't have any children. During the war Aron was at the front. He never remarried. He died of infarction in 1953.
My mother's brother Gregory Haitin finished Music College and then graduated from Kiev Conservatory. He was a violinist. In 1933 he married a Russian girl Tatiana, an accountant. The family didn't mind his marrying a Russian girl. In 1934 their son Vladimir was born. We lived together at that time. Once before the war the boy got pneumonia and his condition was very severe. At night we called director of clinic Galagan. She said "The boy is dying. Would you agree if I do what I believe is necessary?" We agreed and who of us had blood A(I) group. My father did and she transfused a small quantity of his blood to Vladimir 3 times. She rescued the boy in this way. Gregory worked at the Jewish philharmonic near Brodsky synagogue in the center of Kiev.

During the war he evacuated with his family – I don't remember where they went. After the war the Jewish philharmonic moved to Chernovtsy (about 700 km from Kiev) and Gregory and his family moved there, too. He continued to work at the philharmonic and his wife got a job of an

accountant. Vladimir followed in his father's footsteps and became a musician in Chernovtsy Jewish Philharmonic. Gregory died of infarction in 1958 and Tatiana died in 1960s. Vladimir married a Ukrainian girl. They emigrated to the US in 1979. They have a son. They were not religious and didn't observe any Jewish traditions. They celebrated Soviet holidays and enjoyed getting together with friends. They spoke Ukrainian and Russian, but they understood Yiddish and sometimes spoke it with my grandparents.

My mother's younger brother Ilia Haitin was born in 1906. He finished grammar school in Kiev. He graduated from Kiev Polytechnic Institute and was a member of the Communist Party. Before the war he was head of the Party unit at the Ministry of Cattle Trade. It was a very high position that he had. Ilia was my favorite. He was a very nice person. He treated all children very nicely; always gave them gifts on holidays and brought candy. He always told them interesting stories. He was a very intelligent man. He was married to Rosa, a Jew, and they had a son – Vladimir. Ilia perished at the front near Stalingrad (1200 km from Kiev) in 1943. My mother tried to keep in touch with his wife Rosa after the war, but Rosa said "Ilia is dead, so we are no relatives any longer". She just wished to terminate all relationships with us. Rosa and Vladimir live in Kiev.

My mother Leibe was born in 1908 and was the younger in family. She finished a grammar school in Kiev. I know no details about her childhood. She also finished Kiev Pedagogical College. Although her parents were very religious she didn't observe any religious traditions. She had Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish friends. My mother often went for walks in Kreschatik (Editor's note: Kreschatik is the main street of Kiev), to the Jewish theater and to the cinema with them.

My father Miron Wainshtock was born in Nemirov, Kharkov region (in about 400 km from Kiev) in 1900. My mother told me that his parents died of cholera when he was 8. My father had two sisters. When their parents died the girls went to their distant relatives' families. All I know is that their father's name was Jacob. My father worked at the forestry after his parents died. After my father graduated from Kiev military engineering school (about 1929) served in the Red army in Kiev.

All I know about my father's older sister Lena (1902 – 1941) is that she married a grandson of Soshenko in 1925. He was Ukrainian and his last name was Soshenko-Mazyukevich. She didn't take her husband's family name. Her husband was arrested in 1937 and perished in a camp. They had a son – Vladimir. When her husband was arrested she and her husband were hiding in the country and returned to Kiev when the situation calmed down. Lena was a weaver at Darnitsa silk factory. She wore silk gowns at home and it seemed so posh to me. In 1941 all of a sudden Lena got pregnant. It was a disgrace for a single woman at that time and Lena had an illegal abortion (Editor's note: abortions were not allowed at that time in the USSR) and died of hemorrhage. We buried her at the Lesnoy cemetery without any religious rituals.

My father's sister Dina, born in 1905, raised her son Vladimir. Dina finished Pedagogical College. She lived in Dnepropetrovsk (500 km from Kiev). Her husband Nikolay was Russian. He was a foreman at the military plant and earned good money. They didn't have children. During the war when they were in evacuation Lena's son got dysentery and died. After the war Dina and her husband returned to Dnepropetrovsk. She worked as director of nursery school for children of single mothers at the military plant. Dina always asked me and my sister to move to Dnepropetrovsk. She died of asthma in 1954.

After Dina died she was buried according to the Christian ritual. Her husband was Russian and didn't know any traditions and she had no relatives left in Dnepropetrovsk. Dina identified herself as a Jew. She didn't even change her Jewish last name when she got married, but she didn't observe any Jewish traditions or go to synagogue. Uncle and she spoke Russian. Many people came to the repast commemoration. People drank and ate and laughed and I hated it. I couldn't understand how people could forget that her death was such a tragedy and loss and those people seemed to be enjoying themselves. It's a hard memory. Dina's husband remarried, but died in two years after she died.

My parents met each other somewhere in a park in Bessarabka in 1930. My mother was so pretty. My father was a very handsome man. He had blue eyes and fair hair. They got married in 3 months after they met They had a plain civil ceremony.

At first my parents lived with my mother's father in his apartment. Then in about 4 years my father received a room from his military unit. In 1934 my father was sent to serve in the Far East (about 8000 km from Kiev) where my mother and I followed him. We lived in a room there and I remember a portrait of Leninon the wall. There was my parents' bed, my bed and a table in the room. My mother worked at the kindergarten and my father was a commanding officer. In summer my mother and I went to Kiev. My father was awarded a complete volume of Lenin's works and a bicycle for his excellent performance of work.

My father was very intelligent. But in 1937 my father's co-student and friends submitted a report on my father, accusing him of refusing to buy a state loan lottery! (Editor's note: The Soviet power was in bad need of money for development of its industries and issued a state loan lottery in late 1920s. People were forced to buy these loan lotteries.) My father told me later that he had seen and read this paper My father was arrested when my mother and I were in Kiev; he was tortured – every ten minutes he was called to interrogation, they didn't let him sleep. It lasted for about a month. They wanted my father to sign a paper confirming that he was guilty to have a document to sentence him, but my father was a strong person and he didn't accept any accusations.

After he was released he demobilized and returned to Kiev. He became trade union leader at the container factory. Director of this factory was my father's best friend. We lived with my mother's family in Basseynaya Street (Editor's note: one of the central streets in Kiev). In 1938 I went to the first form of Russian secondary school in Kiev. I enjoyed studying and my father spent a lot of time with me. My father was an atheist, but he was very tolerant about my grandparents' faith. He was a convinced communist and was a member of the Communist party since he studied at the military college.
In May 1941 my sister Dina was born.

In 3 months before the war my father was sent to fortify the borders in Western Ukraine. He came to Lena's funeral in Kiev in a week before the war. The war began on 22 June 1941 my father put on his uniform and went to the registry office. There was a kerosene storehouse in the yard and when women that were standing in line saw my father wearing a uniform they burst into tears thinking about their sons, husbands and fathers that were to go to the war. My father stayed with us for another day while his military unit was being formed and then left for the front. We didn't hear from him for a long time.
We were a big family - my grandparents, Gregory, Tatiana and their child, my mother, my younger

sister and I - and had no possibility to evacuate all together. There were not enough transportation means in Kiev to evacuate all those that wanted to leave and the priority was given to important enterprises, their employees and employees' families.

My grandfather told his children to evacuate and take their children. Aunt Sarah was evacuating with her plant and she took my mother, my sister and me with her. We went by train to Novotroitskaya village, Krasnodarskiy village (about 1300 km from Kiev). We got a hospitable reception from the locals. They took us to their houses. The only problem was lack of water at the village. There were cement wells in the yards accumulating precipitations. My father found us there – he sent us his military certificate and told us that our grandparents evacuated to Georgievsk (1200 km from Kiev). We moved there, too.
In Georgievsk we rented a room. Our landlords, a married couple, had no children and liked my sister, she was a beautiful baby with blue eyes and blond hair – she was like an angel. They liked the baby very much and my mother allowed them to cuddle her every now and then. The couple told my mother once that they would give my mother money to have my sister, they must have wanted a child desperately. Besides, they may have thought that my sister and I could starve to death. It wasn't a common thing to "buy" kids during the war, but it was an absurd suggestion of theirs. My mother got very frightened. She paid our landlords one month in advance and arranged for all of us to escape from Georgievsk. We got to the railway station and got a train to Mahachkala from there (1800 km from Kiev). In Mahachkala we waited for our turn to evacuate for a month. Then we boarded a ship - a smaller one) - and then we boarded a bigger ship somewhere in the Caspian Sea. We were allowed to have 5 kilos of baggage with us.

We got off in Krasnovodsk (1300 km from Kiev). There was no water there and every drop was a fortune. In November we got an opportunity to get on railroad platforms to move on. We were passing Samarkand and my mother decided to get off there. We got accommodation at school. We had lice and were terribly dirty. Sarah's daughter Evgenia and I got typhoid. There were any other diseased people lying on the floor in the gym of the school. There were no medications and only by miracle Evgenia and I recovered.

We lived in Samarkand throughout the war. My mother was an observation inspector at the military registry office where officers' wives received their bread rations. My mother was to watch that everything was just and fair. We also received some money by my father's certificate. Aunt Sarah worked at the KINAP (Editor's note: Kiev cinema equipment plant) that was in evacuation in Samarkand.

My grandparents lived with us and Sarah and her family lived somewhere else. We ate boiled water with some flour in the morning and in the afternoon we boiled some sugar beet and added a bit of citric acid to it. There were also some vegetables and tomatoes available. We survived on this food. My grandmother had ulcer and died in 1943. She was buried at the common cemetery in Samarkand.
I studied successfully at Russian secondary school in Samarkand. I was a shy and quiet girl, but I fought back like a fury when somebody tried to hurt me.

In 1943 my mother received a notification that my father was missing near Stalingrad. We loved him so much and hoped that he would survive.

After the war we returned to Kiev.

Aunt Sarah and her family were the first to go to Kiev with the plant where Sarah was working. By the time we came Sarah had a room in Kurenyovka where we stayed at the beginning. There was very little space and we slept on the floor. We tried to get our apartment back but we only received a smaller room in it. We lived in terrible conditions. My mother worked at kindergarten where she earned very little. My sister and I received pension for our father because he was commander of battalion and we could manage. My sister Dina went to the kindergarten where my mother was working.

My grandfather and grandmother managed to evacuate from Kiev in 1941. They reached Georgievsk and moved on to Samarkand, Middle Asia, in 3000 km from Kiev. It was very hot there. There was lack of potable water and plenty of fruit and vegetables and no water to wash them. Epidemics were a usual thing. In 1943 my grandmother died in Samarkand of some infection. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Samarkand. There was a big Jewish community in Samarkand. My grandfather went to the synagogue and celebrated holidays when he could manage. In 1945 grandfather returned to Kiev. He was a pensioner and went to synagogue every day and spent all his time reading religious books. We didn’t see each other often. In 1950 my grandfather died. He called my father before he died. We buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Kurenyovka according to the Jewish ritual. It was a tradition to read a prayer for forty days after somebody died. (Editors note: 40-day mourning is a Christian tradition. I guess, she may have mixed things up). It was to be done by older sons, but they didn’t know any prayers and we had to pay and an old man said prayers at the synagogue.

In Kiev I went to study at an evening school to complete my secondary education and took a course in shorthand and typing. About 1948 my sister Dina went to a Russian secondary school in Kiev. After finishing my course I got a job of a typist at the mining inspection committee. I worked there for a year before I received my school certificate and decided to enter Kiev Institute of Finance. Then I had an entrance exam in mathematic. I had it completed before time, when a young man sitting behind me asked me to give my work to him to copy it off. I gave it to him. When we came later to get to know the result of the test I saw on the list that I had a satisfactory mark and he got “excellent”. This was when I faced anti-Semitism. It was a general mood of these days. Newspapers continuously published anti-Semitic articles about murderers of doctors. So I understood that it was my last name that caused problems. So, I wasn’t admitted to this Institute. But then representatives from Moscow Institute of Statistics came to Kiev looking for somebody willing to study in their Institute. I was willing. Besides, I had all highest grades in my school certificate. I was admitted to the faculty of public economy planning without exams. I studied by correspondence. There was an affiliate of this institute in Kiev and I attended lectures every Sunday. I also continued to work as a typist. My boss valued me highly. He wanted me to become a member of the Communist party. He believed it was necessary for the one that wanted to make a career. I became member of the Communist party in 1960s. The process was simple for me. They had a schedule for a specific number of people to join the Communist Party. My boss insisted that I became a communist even though I was a Jew. I was a breadwinner in my family. My salary was 410 rubles. I lived with my mother and sister. It took me no time to mature. My mother was a tutor at kindergarten. She earned less than I did. My sister went to the 3rd form of a Russian secondary school in Kiev.

In 1952 I got a job of economist in Ugolsbyt (Editor's note: acronym: "Coal sales"), a state department that distributed fuel between state enterprises and citizens. At that time many apartments were heated with coal and wood. My boss' deputy involved me in public activities when he noticed my talents. I could speak well in front of audience and have a problem discussed at meetings. I had an excellent memory. When we had an audit chairman of the commission said it was the first time in his time when all files were so clear and complete. The affiliate of my Institute in Kiev became part of Kiev Institute of public Economy that I graduated.

In 1958 my sister Dina entered the faculty of technology at the Institute of Food Industry in Leningrad after finishing school. Dina met her future husband in Leningrad. He studied at the Academy of Arts.
In 1959 I married Isaac Sheenvaald, a handsome Jewish young man. He worked at Kiev mechanic plant and I met him at a party there. He was born to a very poor Jewish family in Kiev in 1928. I don't know where his parents came from. Isaac finished lower secondary school in Kiev and went to study at the factory trade school to become a locksmith. In 1961 our daughter Marina was born. At that time my office was to be liquidated and my management arranged for my transfer to a higher-level coal department. I became an economist there. I was very devoted to work. And I was very strict with men. It was necessary to be so as there were mostly men around me.

In 1963 I received an apartment from the Ministry and my mother, my husband, my daughter and I moved to this new apartment. Before 1963 we lived with my mother and sister in our old apartment in Basseynaya Street. In 1960 our house was to be removed and we got a two-room apartment to move in. My mother retired in 1963 and helped me to look after my daughter. On Soviet holidays our Jewish and non-Jewish friends visited us. We partied and sang Soviet songs. We went to theaters and read a lot of Russian and foreign books. In summer my daughter and I often went to the Crimea. We didn't face any anti-Semitism at this period of time. My daughter was doing well at school. She was a pioneer and Komsomol member. She was a very sociable girl and had many friends of various nationalities. We didn't pay any attention to people's nationality.

In 1963 my sister Dina married her artist, a Russian man. Her husband is a nice man and nobody in our family ever wanted anybody to marry specifically Jewish men. My mother believed that nationality didn't matter and that it was more important for people to be happy. Dina never observed Jewish traditions in her life. But after she retired, about 8 years ago, she went to work in the community at the synagogue. She visits older people helping them with their housekeeping issues. She became deeply religious. Dina honors the Jewish religion. She may not observe all traditions according to the rules, but she is a true believer. I don't know how she turned to religion. Perhaps, because she is single? She doesn't have children.

My boss went to work at the Ministry of Construction materials and called me with him. I started working there in 1973 and understood that taking this job was my mistake. I was loved and respected at the coal department, my previous job, and in the Ministry of Construction I had to establish new relationships and watch that everything was done according to the rules. It was a very difficult time for me. I retired from the Ministry as soon as I turned 55.

Since then I spent my time in my country house or taking care of my mother that was very sickly.. My mother died in 2001 and I still grieve for her. There was a rabbi at her funeral – my sister insisted on that, although my mother had asked to observe no rituals. My mother had never

observed any traditions.

I won’t tell you about my husband. We have been divorced for a long time and I don’t like to recall the time we were together.

My daughter Marina finished a Russian secondary school in Kiev. She didn’t want to continue her education and couldn’t find a job to her liking for a long time. She is a volunteer at a social services department and she likes it. She was married, but her marriage only lasted for 2 years. She divorced her husband. She has a daughter – Margarita. Margarita goes to a Jewish school. Margarita enjoys studying the history of our people, its traditions and religious holidays. Marina has attended synagogue for some time. She knows religious holidays and tells me how to celebrated them. We celebrate Pesach and Yom Kippur. I make Gefilte fish. We have matsah at home at Pesach. We don’t have such fancy table sets for Pesach as my grandparents did, but we try to keep our spirits high and that is what matters. Now I’m very attached to my country house where I can grow vegetables and fruit in my small gardens to make preserves for winter.

If I were considering emigration, I would go to the US. I believe it is the only country where Jews have a quiet life. My friends moved to Israel, America or USA in the end 1970s. We couldn’t move because of my mother’s condition.. Now we have no close relatives left in Israel and to go there one needs an invitation from a member of the family. I am very interested in what is going on in Israel. I believe it to be our ancient Motherland. I have cousins there – they invite me to visit them. I couldn’t go before because I had to look after my mother. The current situation there is tough and dramatic and my daughter, my granddaughter and I are in two minds about moving there. Now I think if Marina and Margarita decided to move to Israel I would follow them. There is nothing to hold me here.