

# Faina Melamed

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Odessa

Ukraine

Interviewer: Tatiana Portnaya

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*Faina Melamed is a 74-year-old short fatty lady with big sad eyes. She takes care of herself: she has a nice haircut and well-groomed colored hair and she has a lilac dress on matching with her eyes. Faina lives in a two-bedroom apartment with her husband Yefim Shpielberg. Her apartment is very clean. She has quite a collection of china crockery and statues in two cupboards: this was Faina's hobby in the past. Now she sells pieces of this collection: her husband's and her pensions are too small to make their living. Behind the glass there is a photograph of their daughter who died in a tragic accident and photos of their grandchildren. During our conversation Faina listens to the telephone intently. She always waits for her grandchildren to call.*



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## **My family background**

My maternal grandfather Arie Goichman was born and lived in Golovanevsk town, Kirovohrad region. [It is a town in Baltski district, Podolsk province. According to the census of 1897 its population was 8,148 residents, 4,320 of them were Jews.] Regretfully, I cannot tell even approximate date of his birth. From what my mother told me I know that my grandfather Arie owned a mill and had grain stocks. I guess he had some secular education. It goes without saying that he had religious education. He was very religious and knew Torah well. My mother told me that grandfather Arie was tall, wore a yarmulka and always put on his glasses to read the Torah. There was a synagogue in the town. My grandfather went to the synagogue every Saturday. He recited a prayer at home in the morning, put on his tallit and tefillin. They all spoke Yiddish in the family. My grandfather had a house and kept livestock. They had an orchard and vegetable garden and kept chickens, geese and cows. There was always fresh milk and eggs in the house. They

baked bread, I don't have any information about my grandfather's date or place of death. I think he died in Golovanevsk in 1910s.

My grandmother Hana Goichman (I don't know the date of her birth) was born in this same town. She was raising the children and keeping the house. My mother told me that my grandmother was a wise and courageous woman. She always wore a kerchief and on Sabbath she put on a lace shawl that she passed on to my mother later. On Sabbath my grandmother lit as many candles as there were members in the family. My grandfather returned from the synagogue, recited Kiddush, and the family sat down to dinner. They observed kashrut strictly. My grandmother taught my mother to observe kashrut. For example, my grandmother always salted meat and waited until all blood was gone and only then she started cooking it. My mother did so as well, and so do I. My grandmother Hana was a good housewife. My mother told me that there was ideal order and cleanness in their house. Even locks were polished. My grandmother died in Golovanevsk in the 1930s. Grandmother had five children: three sons and two daughters.

Her older son Victor was born in 1885. He studied in cheder and then in yeshivah. At the age of about 20 he moved to Odessa. He served at the synagogue and continued his studies. I don't know how his position was called. Victor married a Jewish girl named Molka. They had two daughters and two sons. During the Great Patriotic War [1](#) Victor, his wife and their daughters Sara and Hana evacuated to Samarkand. Their sons went to the front and perished. I only know the name of one of them: Abram. Victor fell ill with typhoid and died in Samarkand during the war. He was buried in the cemetery of Buchara Jews. [Buchara Jews are an ethnic group of Jews residing in Middle Asia. They are descendants of Mesopotamian Jews. They spoke the Farce dialect.] He was buried according to the Jewish traditions. I remember that my mother sat shivah and didn't even return home for several days. After the war Victor's wife Molka and her two daughters moved to some place in Kazakhstan where she died in a tragic accident. She was riding a bull-driven wagon in the steppe doing some task when she lost her way and froze to death. This happened in winter. She was buried in Kazakhstan. Her daughters Sara and Hana returned to Odessa, but I lost contact with them.

The names of two other brothers of my mother were Baruch and Gedali. I cannot tell for sure, but I believe Baruch was born in 1887 and Gedali was born in 1889. They studied in cheder. Grandfather Arie helped them to buy a mill. They became its owners. During the Civil War [2](#) their employees killed them.

My mother's older sister Faina was born in 1893. I don't know anything about her life, but my mother told me how she died. During the Civil War a Petlura's [3](#) gang came to the town. Faina was sitting at home holding her baby and one of Petlura's bandits killed her and the baby with a sword.

My mother's younger sister Rosa was born in 1899. Rosa left Golovanevsk for Shpola town near Kiev where she married Rovin Yampolski. He was an artist. They had a hard and poor life before the Great Patriotic War. I remember how my mother sent them a letter and some money, Rosa wrote back that she was so happy and that my mother's letter was like a gift from heaven. When the war began we lost track of them. After the war we visited Shpola. Its residents told us that during the Great Gatriotic War Germans drowned Rosa and her husband in a well. Somebody gave us a small still life picture that Rosa's husband painted. This is all that we have of my mother's sister.

My mother Leya Melamed was born in Golovanevsk town in 1897. I don't know where she studied, but she had education. She could read and write in Russian. She spoke Yiddish with my father at home and she knew many prayers. Perhaps, she studied in a Jewish school. Somehow I didn't ask my mother these questions and now I can only guess. I remember that my mother danced waltz and tango beautifully. In her childhood her closest friend was her cousin sister Rieva. My mother was an interesting woman. She was slim, had a slender waist and beautiful face. She never used make up, but had pink cheeks. I don't know how my mother met my father, but I think it happened in Golovanevsk.

My paternal grandfather Yakov Melamed - whose date of birth I don't know, regretfully -, was born and lived in Odessa. Grandfather Yakov had education. He spoke Yiddish and Russian and had a good conduct of English. He was a rich man, an industrialist. He had a luxurious apartment in 20, Petra Velikogo Street and his own carriage and horses. My grandfather was a gambler and used to lose a lot of money. My grandmother divorced him and raised her four children herself. My grandfather died in the 1920s.

My paternal grandmother Sara Melamed, nee Shpolianskaya, was born in Odessa. Unfortunately, I don't know her date of birth either. My father told me that she finished a grammar school and received music education. She played the piano. My grandmother had to earn her living. It was a difficult period of the Civil War and October [Russian] Revolution [4](#). My grandmother played at concerts and gave private lessons. My grandmother Sara lived in Odessa in the family of her younger daughter Eva. During the Great Patriotic war she perished in the ghetto. I don't know any details of her death.

My father's older sister Enia was born in 1891. She received elementary education in a Jewish elementary school. Enia got married at an early age and moved to Moscow. I don't know who her husband was. Enia was a housewife and raised children. She had two sons: Senia and Yasha. Yasha became an engineer. He managed construction of furnaces. Senia also had some official position. I don't know any details. They lived in Moscow. Enia died in Moscow in 1965. Her sons also passed away.

My father's brother Pavel was born in Odessa. For some reason he had the same date of birth indicated in his passport as my father: 1895. We, children, even used to laugh at it. However, they were not twins. One of them had a different date of birth, of course. Pavel finished the vocal department of Odessa Conservatory. He became a singer and worked in Moscow Philharmonic under the pseudonym of Pavel Riazanski. He often went on tours. Before the Great Patriotic War, when we were in Samarkand, my father saw a poster with his brother's picture and name of Pavel Riazanski on it. My father ran to the Philharmonic immediately. It was a wonderful meeting. There was a party. A lamb was slaughtered for the occasion and guests danced on tables. I remember uncle Pavel as a cheerful and charming man. His wife Elena was a Jew. They had three sons: Lyonia, Edik and Igor. Pavel died in the 1960s. He was buried in Moscow. Their older son Edik played in a military orchestra 21 years. He fell ill. His family thought there was something wrong with his stomach, but it turned out to be worse: cancer. He died young in the 1970s. I remember well that it happened in March. I saw Lyonia when he was a small boy when my uncle came on tours. Igor, the youngest, visited us few years ago (in the 1990s). He came from Gorkiy with his wife. They stayed with us. We received them very well. We went to a restaurant. Now I have no information about Lyonia or Igor's life.

My father's younger sister Yeva was born in 1897. She finished a conservatory. She played the piano and taught in a music school. Yeva married musician Alexandr Krylov, a Jew. In 1930 Yeva gave birth to her son Semyon and in 1936 her son Leonid was born. During the Great Patriotic War Yeva's husband Alexandr perished at the front. Yeva and her children failed to evacuate and they perished in Odessa during [Romanian] occupation [5](#). Semyon was killed when he came outside to consider the weather when all of a sudden Romanians appeared 'Ah, zhydovskaya morda!' [Jewish mug] and killed him. Yeva, her younger son Leonid and my grandmother Sara were in the ghetto in Odessa. My grandmother perished and Yeva and her son miraculously survived. After the war Leonid finished a conservatory and moved to live in Moscow. He played the violin in a symphonic orchestra conducted by Svetlanov. [Evgeniy Fyodorovich Svetlanov, 1928–2003, was a Soviet conductor and composer. In 1965 he became art director and chief conductor of the State Symphonic Orchestra of the USSR.] He toured to many countries across the world with this orchestra. He also gave solo concerts. He still works in this orchestra. Aunt Yeva died in Moscow in 1950s.

My father Efim Melamed was born on 9 September 1895. I have an excerpt from the synagogue roster that indicates that he was born in Uman. I don't know how the family happened to be in Uman at that period of time. My father studied at school and received religious education at home. He and his brother studied Hebrew and Torah with a teacher who visited them at home. He also had private classes of playing the violin. My father's family had a talent for music. When the World War I began my father served as a private in the tsarist army. When the October Revolution began he went to the Red army [6](#). He served in the troops under command of red commander Yakir [7](#). I think he did it because he knew about pogroms and the attitude of tsarist power to Jews. He believed that the new regime would bring wealth and prosperity to all. He had a cavalry unit under his command. At home we used to keep letters of gratitude and awards of my father that disappeared later. My father was wounded in his face and had his jaws and tongue seamed. When he met with my mother in Golovanevsk he had long hair and looked like a gypsy, but my mother liked him anyway. They decided to get married.

My parents got married in Golovanevsk in 1920. My mother told me about her wedding. She didn't even have a wedding gown. They found a cut of fabric at home. A tailor cut it for a dress and fixed the cut on her with pins and she spent a whole evening wearing this dress. My mother said that they invited a rabbi and had a chuppah. My grandmother Hana did the cooking and the whole family was helping her.

My father wasn't a communist, but he always held key positions. He was responsible for meat stocks in Golovanevsk. In 1921 my older brother Boris was born. Since my parents spoke Yiddish at home Boris knew Yiddish well. In 1925 my sister Esfir was born. My parents moved to Odessa from Golovanevsk approximately in 1927. I was born in Odessa on 25 February 1929. During famine [8](#) in 1932 my father was sent to work in Samarkand in Uzbekistan. We traveled by train. I don't know exactly what his work was about, but he had to work a lot. Before the Great Patriotic War he was director of a bakery.

## **Growing up**

In Samarkand we lived in the neighborhood of Buchara Jews and my father spoke Hebrew with them because they want to. [Buchara Jews spoke a Farce dialect, Faina's father spoke Yiddish,

therefore, the only language they could communicate in was Hebrew, the language of the Torah.] We were accommodated in the house owned by a woman, who also living there. There was a big verandah and a basement in her house. We lodged in three rooms: bedroom, dining room and a long narrow room that was like a corridor – the children slept in it. The walls were whitewashed and there were photographs and portraits on them. There were stone floors that we rubbed with a metal scraper until it became yellow. There was a big oak table in the dining room where our family got together on holidays. There were nickel-plated beds with ironclad base. There was a wardrobe with a mirror in my parents' bedroom. It was a most valuable piece in our home. We had a Buchara-type kitchen. There was a fireplace in the center and everything was baked and cooked on the floor. It was a pit of about 20 cm deep with coal in it. There was a U-brick stand. On Sabbath coal was put in this pit. It smoldered in the pit and kept warmth through Saturday. Buchara Jews cooked delicious food and we borrowed their recipes. (I used to do my cooking in Buchara manner, but not any more.) My father made stocks of raisins, dried apricots and nuts for winter. He kept apples and vegetables in sand. My parents also bought lamb, treated it in a special manner, added pepper, salt, garlic and various spices. This meat and the vegetables were kept in the cellar. My father was very good at doing things about the house.

We didn't have much to live on, but my mother always demanded that the house was kept clean. We whitewashed the walls, rubbed the floors and washed everything. There were frequent earthquakes that resulted in cracks in the walls. After each earthquake we began repairs. We had a toilet in the yard. There was a small lake near our house from where we took water for cooking. We also washed and bathed in this lake. We went to bathe in the lake every evening. In summer we stayed outside all the time. We even took our beds to the yard to sleep outside. When it was very hot my brother and sister and I went to bathe in the waterfalls. The water there was cold and it felt nice to be standing in this water. We climbed trees and picked fruit.

When we came to Samarkand my brother Boris continued studying in a Russian school. Boris was very talented. He could listen to what his teachers explained in class and this was sufficient for him. After finishing school he entered the Medical College. Boris was very sociable and had many Uzbek and Russian friends. Once before the war my father gave him an expensive Swiss watch. Boris lost it. We were all upset. My mother said that if it was the God's intention that he found his watch he had to walk again on the same road. My brother went back and found his watch.

My sister Esfir studied in the same Russian school as Boris, in Samarkand. There were Russian, Uzbek and Jewish children in her school. They never discussed nationality issues. Esfir studied very well. She was very reserved, responsible and hardworking. She stayed awake until late at night doing her homework. After finishing school Esfir entered the Medical College like her brother Boris.

My childhood was quiet. I didn't go to kindergarten. My brother and sister looked after me when my parents were at work. I went to school in 1936. I can hardly remember my first teacher. I remember that it was hard for me at school. My brother and sister studied in this same school. They were good at school and from the first days of my studies my teachers kept telling me that I should be as good as they and try as hard as they to be the best. And I was a fidget! I wanted to be different from them and was often naughty. I did well with my studies, but I wasn't as assiduous or industrious as my sister. My mother worked at the knitwear factory and didn't have time to spend with us. I got along well with my brother and sister and we were close friends. This is how we were growing up.



My parents tried to observe Jewish traditions when we were in Samarkand. My mother went to the synagogue on Sabbath and holidays. My father didn't go to the synagogue. Probably his position didn't allow him to, but he prayed usually at home with his tallit and tefillin on. My father had a prayer book and my mother had a different one. Before Sabbath my sister and I helped my mother to do the apartment. My mother cooked a lot of food and we prepared for celebration of Sabbath. My mother lit two candles. My brother and sister could understand and speak Yiddish well while I could only understand it. Our preparations to Pesach usually took several days. We cleaned off any breadcrumbs in the apartment. We used special crockery. I remember well big plates with portioners and special inscriptions in Hebrew instructing what food should be placed in them. At Pesach we all reclined on cushions around the fireplace on the floor. I found it funny when my father recited prayers. Once at Pesach my father was reciting a prayer in Hebrew from some special book [editor's note: she refers to the Haggadah here] and we were singing songs. My brother and sister were very serious about it, but I burst into laughter all of a sudden. My father got very offended.

We didn't face any anti-Semitism in Samarkand before the war. We observed our Jewish holidays, Uzbek people celebrated theirs and Russians had their celebrations. We celebrated Soviet holidays - 1 May, October Revolution Day [9](#) all together. Housewives of all nationalities came to the market where they could buy whatever food each of them needed. There were shochets that slaughtered chickens, cows and sheep. We bought meat from them. My mother bought milk from Bucharan Jews. She knew that they observed kashrut and they kept milk in a special bucket that they never used for other products.

Arrests in 1937 [during Great Terror] [10](#) didn't affect our family. However, we had a neighbor, who came to us one night and told us with tears in her eyes that her husband Volodia had been arrested. Her husband was a communist. He was a Party official. Some time later she was ordered to move out of their apartment and they moved into a basement.

### **During the war**

After I finished the 5th form in 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. I remember the day when the war began. Our relatives from Kazakhstan were visiting us. We went to swim in the lake: I, Esfir, Boris, Ania, my mother's cousin sister and Sopha, my mother's niece. We were going past the club where we used to go dancing in the evening when we heard Levitan [11](#) on the radio. He broke the news that the war began. My father was 46 and had stomach ulcer, but he said he didn't want to stay at home when such disaster happened. He felt he was bound to go to the front in 1942.

There were people in evacuation in Samarkand. Some worked as teachers in schools. I remember that I just loved our teacher of mathematic Rachel Iosipovna, a Jew from Leningrad. She was a very good teacher and a kind and nice lady. I also remember very well our teacher of Physics Roman Israilevich, a Jew. Thanks to his presentation such difficult subject as physics became easy to understand for me. Somehow I thought that teachers who were there in evacuation were better specialists than local teachers. I also remember my teacher of history. He was blind and his wife accompanied him to our class. During classes she used to sit at the last desk altering and patching old clothes. This teacher could listen to a pupil's answer, but he knew when pupils were just reading from the textbook. Director of our school Mark Zavulonovich, a Bucharan Jew, was a very cultured and intelligent man, but a strict director. Our teachers were kind and we took advantage

of their kindness. During classes we used to escape from school through windows (our classroom was on the ground floor) and go to swim in the lake. Teachers often invited my mother to come to see them to discuss my conduct. Afterward I tried to be quiet for few days, but then I continued in my usual manner. We were all friends in my class. We often went to the cinema and played many games. I had many friends of various nationalities. My close friend Nadia was Russian. Her father worked at the mill and they lived there. They often gave me flat cookies that her mother made. Nadia and her family supported us during the war.

During the war we were selling our belongings and books (my father had a big collection) to buy food. Esfir continued her studies in college during the war. During their practical training my sister was so accurate with her diagnostics that it surprised her teachers. My sister received food coupons in college. My mother made zatirukha [a kind of porridge] from corns. We ate everything eatable to survive. It was possible to buy bread, but it was far too expensive and besides, one had to stand in line a whole night to get it. But when we managed to buy a loaf of bread how happy we were! My mother made lemonade, we cut bread in small pieces and enjoyed the meal to the utmost. We were always feeling hungry!

My brother Boris was mobilized to the army in 1943 and in a month went to the front. My mother kept praying for Boris and for father. She lit an oil wick (there were no candles) and recited prayers. My father perished in 1943. We received a notification that my father perished defending our Motherland. My mother kept this notification for a long time, but it got lost when we were moving into a new apartment and I don't know where my father perished. My brother was an attendant and then a medical nurse assistant in hospital. He was wounded and was taken to hospital and then demobilized. He returned home in spring 1945. He continued to study in medical college.

### **After the war**

I remember 9 May 1945 [Victory Day] very well. The radio announced that the war was over. People hugged in the streets and we hopped and screamed. Our housekeeping manager kept telling people that it would be good to hang a red flag. Where would one find a flag? I had a cherry dress that I cut apart and hanged it as a flag. It looked different, but people didn't mind. They were crying and rejoicing. Of course, we were in the rear and didn't go through all horrors of the war, but we saw people in evacuation dying of cold and hunger, even though we were trying to support and help them as much as we could.

Some time later we received a letter from aunt Yeva from Odessa. She and her son managed to survive in the ghetto miraculously. Their apartment was robbed and they were miserable poor. My mother and I packed whatever we could and sent her this package with our neighbor who was going back to Odessa.

After finishing school in 1946 I entered an advanced three-year course at the medical School. After finishing it I began to work in an infectious hospital. Once I went to a kishlak on business trip. There were many severely ill patients in this village. I got scared that I might fail to help them and I ran away. I was afraid of going back to hospital to pick my documents and I was hiding away. Later my sister and I went there to pick my belongings but still I didn't pick my documents. I never went back to work. I was young and stupid. Once I bumped into chief doctor of our hospital. He said 'It's only because I respect your sister I shall not sue you'. This was the end of my medical career and my only practice was looking after my mother.

In the late 1940s we got to know from the radio about the establishment of Israel. At that time I had a vague idea what it was all about, but now, when we hear about military actions there we get very concerned. As for Buchara Jews grew up among, kept saying 'Jerushalaim, Israel!' They want to move to the Israel.

After finishing his college Boris went to work as a doctor. In 1951 he wanted to get married, but my mother and the girl's parents were against it since the girl's name was Leya like my mother's and this is against Jewish rules. [Editor's note: This was a custom among some branches of the ultra-Orthodox.] Boris went to Odessa at the invitation of aunt Yeva and stayed there. However, he failed to find a job in Odessa and he moved to Pervomaysk, Nikolayev region, where he went to work as a surgeon in hospital. He was a good specialist. Boris never complained of anti-Semitism. He worked in Pervomaysk about 10 years and then he moved to Illichevsk [12](#) where he went to work in a polyclinic. Boris was married twice. His first wife's name was Yeva. She was a very beautiful Jewish woman, but Boris couldn't provide for her to her liking and they divorced. In the 1960s he married a Russian woman named Lena. They had a son named Yuri. They lived 8 years together, but then they divorced. I was helping my brother to raise his son. After finishing school Yuri finished the Railroad College in the 1980s. Later Yuri took down to business. He owns few leather and children's toys stores. He is a very wealthy man. He has a big three-storied house. He married a Russian girl named Lena. They have a daughter named Svetlana. I love my nephew dearly and he also likes me and my husband. He supported his father and now he supports us. My brother Boris died in 2000 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Odessa.

After finishing college Esfir worked in Samarkand for some time. In 1952 she followed her brother to Odessa. She couldn't find a job in Odessa. This happened in the height of the period of Doctors' Plot' [13](#). The railroad department employed her as a doctor in Tsvetkovo railway junction. She was the only doctor in the area and got great medical experience in all spheres: she practiced as obstetrician, midwife, cardiologist, etc. She was much respected and valued for her professionalism, kindness and responsiveness. Once her patient said that she wanted her to meet her son who returned from the army. Half a year later my sister married this man. His name was Anatoli Kurmaz. He was Ukrainian. Anatoli worked as a mechanic at the aerodrome. In 1956 my niece Victoria was born. Esfir received an apartment with all comforts in Tsvetkovo: they had running water and toilet.

In 1953, when Stalin died I grieved a lot after him. I collected newspaper articles about him and reread them crying. My mother reprimanded me that even when my father died I didn't grieve as much as I did after Stalin.

After my sister's departure I finished a course for typists and went to work in an art shop where my acquaintance helped me to get a job. My brother Boris was calling us to Odessa. In 1954 we sold everything we could and moved to Odessa where we rented a room in Peresyp [in an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. I couldn't find a job in Odessa for a long time. Wherever I came they asked me 'Where have you come from?' The second question was usually the last one 'Your nationality?' And they refused. Besides, I didn't have a residence permit [14](#). It lasted so long and I started to have depression. I came to the bakery in Lenin Street looking for a job. One shop superintendent of this bakery told me that he would help me with the permit, but that he could do nothing about a job. He told me to go to a clerk in the militia department in Frantsuzski Boulevard. They asked me few questions and issued a residence permit for one year. Later my brother Boris



came to Odessa. He had many friends and acquaintances and one of them, whose surname was Goryunov, helped me to obtain a permanent residential permit in Odessa. My brother's friends also helped me to get a job of secretary at food storage. Its manager Ivanov who was Russian was raised in a Jewish family and had a good attitude toward Jews. I worked for him 8 years.

When I went to work I had my name included in the list of those who needed a lodging. My mother and I rented another apartment in Ostrovidova Street. We had two small rooms in the basement. My mother made all arrangements required for observance of kashrut and keeping meat products and dairies separately. There were boards and drawers, utensils and crockery. When she returned to Odessa she found a small synagogue in Peresyp, and went there to pray regularly. I didn't join her. She said prayers at home in the morning and in the evening. On Friday evening my mother lit candles. She never did any work on Saturday.

In 1957 a bunch of young people came to a party at my friend Raya's place on the October Revolution Day. Boys contributed five rubles each for the party and girls 3 rubles. They told me to make meat. My mother bought beef sirloin and I fried it nicely. I wasn't quite eager to go to this party. I had no interest in any of the young people to be there. I dressed up and put on a small apron to kind of serve at the table. I was just going to kill time. When they began to dance Sasha, a Russian boy, invited me. Then I got another invitation from Efim Shpielberg. He was a handsome boy. I danced with him and he convinced me to take off my apron and enjoy the party like everybody else did. By the end of the party he declared to me 'You will be my wife'. I advised him to test his feelings. After this party he invited me to his aunt Polia's birthday. I got confused and asked him 'What if your mother doesn't like me?' and he replied 'It's all done! It doesn't matter whether she likes you or not! I've made a decision!' We didn't have any wedding party. He just came to live with us in our basement. His mother was angry 'Why go to this cell? You have such girls with apartments!' and he replied 'You go take a look at this cell. It's as clean as a pharmacy!'

Efim was born to a religious Jewish family in Odessa in 1929. His father Israel Shpielberg was born near Odessa in 1898. He cut fabrics. He perished at the front near Rostov in 1943. His mother Maria Shpielberg was born in Odessa in 1902, in Moldavanka [a poor Jewish neighborhood on the outskirts of Odessa]. She was a dressmaker. During the Great Patriotic War he got lost during evacuation in Novorossiysk. He was 12 years old. Our soldiers in an artillery battery gave him shelter and he stayed with them. In 1943 he found his mother and sisters in Nukha town, Azerbaijan. After the war they returned to Odessa. Efim finished a military railroad school in Odessa. In 1950 he went to serve in the army. After he returned he changed many jobs before he went to work as foreman of a construction crew at Vorovski factory.

We got married two years after we met. In 1959 we had a civil ceremony in a registry office. My mother cooked something and we ground some coffee. I invited my Russian neighbor Nadia. She was my friend. Efim's mother and my distant relative also came to the wedding. My sister Esfir was away from Odessa at this time. In general, we had a small wedding party. I didn't have a wedding gown. Life was hard after the war. After we got married we lived in my home in 108, Ostrovidova Street. Although we lived in the basement we kept our rooms ideally clean. We hanged a curtain in one room to separate a kitchen area: there was a kerogas stove, a bucket and a sink with a tap. The rooms were heated with a coal-stoked stove. We fetched water from the yard. We did our laundry in the yard. It was particularly hard in winter when water was ice-cold. There was a toilet in the yard. I was scared of going there since there were rats inside. My mother did all housekeeping.

In 1960 my daughter Mila was born.

In 1966 I received a two-bedroom apartment with all comforts in a 5-storied building in Primorskiy district in Odessa. We were so happy about it. Two rooms: one passage room 20 square meters and a bedroom, 16 square meters. 6-square meter kitchen with a gas stove. There was a bathroom. Our neighbors were young and all had children. We got along well with them. Mila went to the kindergarten. In 1968 she went to school # 56. Mila wanted to study music and we bought her a piano. She went to music school with her friends.

My husband earned well and we traveled a lot. We went on cruises on the Black Sea several times. We visited Sochi, Yalta, Novorossiysk, Batumi and Sukhumi. They were fascinating, but expensive trips. We went to the Baltic Republics where we visited Riga, Tallinn and Yurmala. I liked going to Moscow and Leningrad. We had a good time in Minsk. We liked the town. There were many of my friends from Samarkand. In 1976 my husband and I took a 2-month trip to Uzbekistan. We visited Tashkent, Bucharra and Samarkand, the town of my youth. I felt like being young again; I breathed in the air of my childhood: pise-walled huts, meandering streets and rich bazaars in Samarkand with plenty of fruit, greeneries, heaps of dried apricots and melons.

About this time I also took trips to Bulgaria and Romania. However, there was a woman from Ovidiopol in our tourist group who kept talking about zhydy [abusive word for a Jew] all the time. She treated me all right and I said to her 'But you hurt me!' and she replied 'It has nothing to do with you'. When we were in Bucharest, during the excursion, when our tour guide was telling us about a picture of a Jewish artist she gathered people around her and began to talk about zhydy. Her presence spoiled my whole trip.

In 1968 my mother-in-law Maria Shpielberg died. We buried her as older people recommended. There was a group of older Jews at the cemetery. They recited the Kaddish for some compensation. In 1976 my mother Leya Melamed died. She was ill for a long time and we attended to her. We also buried her in the Jewish cemetery. Older Jews at the cemetery recited the Kaddish for some compensation.

In 1970 Esfir and her family came to live in Odessa. She went to work as a therapist in the railroad polyclinic and her husband Anatoli went to work at a plant. Their daughter Victoria continued to study at school. Victoria often stayed with us since her school was nearby. In 1972 they received a two-bedroom apartment with all comforts in Tairova settlement [a new district in Odessa]. After finishing school Victoria entered the sanitary Equipment Faculty of Construction College. She finished it successfully and worked as an engineer in a design institute. In 1984 my sister's husband died. In 1991, at the age of 35 Victoria married Alexandr Nikolaev, Russian. He worked as a painter. They had a son named Sasha. In 2000 they moved to Oldenburg in Germany and Esfir went with them. They miss what they've left. Victoria cannot find a job and is very much concerned about it. Her son Sasha goes to a German school and can already speak German well. My sister has private patients: our emigrants from Ukraine and Russia. She can diagnose very well, listen to a patient and be compassionate.

My daughter Mila studied well at school. She had many friends at school and in the yard. I was very happy that children liked her: it meant she was growing to be an honest and decent person. She was chairman of the council of her pioneer unit in class and then she became secretary of the school Komsomol [15](#) unit. She invited her classmates to birthdays or other holidays at home. I

grumbled about it: I had a lot of cooking and cleaning to do. My husband always calmed me down in such situations. When children came to our home I always tried to make them sufficient food and make them feel at ease.

In 1978 Mila finished school and entered the Faculty of Cryogen Engineering in the Refrigeration College. She studied successfully in the College. She passed all exams and tests on time. There were always young men around her. She made many friends and there were Jewish friends among them. Once she met a Russian guy named Andrei Makarenko, student of the Construction College, at a party. We wanted Mila to marry a good Jewish man, but look what happened. Mila got pregnant and they got married in 1981. Mila and Andrei had a civil ceremony in a registry office. My husband rented a hall for two days in a nice health center. Our guests could stay inside or go outside.

Andrei came to live with us. The newly weds settled down in the bedroom and we stayed in our passage room. In 1982 my first grandson Igor was born. Mila continued her studies, Andrei worked as a painter and I had to quit work to take care of my grandson. I enjoyed it, though my age had its affect on me and Igor was a restless and sickly boy. I remember once I wet to a grocery store pushing the pram with Igor when he was a baby. They were selling pineapples and there was a long line. I asked the to let me buy ahead of the line and people didn't mind. One woman, however, didn't like it at all and tried to push me out of the line with her elbows. I managed to buy these pineapples and when I was leaving the store I heard 'Look, this zhydovka ignored the line!' This was the first time in my life I heard anything like this. I grabbed her shopping bags from her and hit them on her head. An elderly old man standing in line said loudly 'You've done it right, woman!' This was the only time in my life when I heard an abuse.

Mila finished her college in 1984 and went to work as an engineer in a design institute. In 1984 Andrei's mother received an apartment and she could keep her old lodging as well. Andrei and Mila moved in to her apartment. Actually, it was a two-bedroom communal apartment where they only had one room. My husband gave them money to buy construction materials and Andrei renovated this room. Some time later their neighbor tenant died and they received her room and became owners of a two-bedroom apartment. In 1986 our granddaughter Yulia was born. Mila left her work and became a housewife. My husband was very happy about his granddaughter's birth and bought a car that he gave to Mila and Andrei. In 1989, 13 April they had an accident. Mila died and Andrei survived. This was the most horrific moment in our life. We buried Mila in the Jewish cemetery. I don't know where we got strength to outlive this grief, but I cried day in and day out. To go on living we took our grandchildren to live with us.

Some time later Andrei married a Russian woman. In 1995 the Jewish school Or Sameach [16](#) opened in Odessa. Igor went to study in this school. One year later he was circumcised and got a Jewish name of Igal. Yulia also studied in Or Sameach. The children studied Jewish traditions, Ivrit, Jewish prayers and observed Jewish holidays. They go to the synagogue on Jewish holidays and take us with them. Sometimes they ask me to cook for a holiday. They like to observe Pesach. I make wonderful gefilte fish and broth with matzah. Before Pesach Yulia helps me to clean the apartment. I made for the grandchildren holiday supper. When the children grew bigger they went to live with their father, but they often come to see us.

After finishing school Igor entered the Faculty of Economics and Law in Odessa University. Igor studies at the extramural department and works as a consultant assistant in a store selling household appliances. Yulia entered the Faculty of Culturology in Odessa University after finishing school in 2003. We have very nice and caring grandchildren.

Of course, we are in need. It's impossible to live on our pension and we don't have any additional allowances. We receive food packages from Gmilus Hesed, a Jewish organization, and my nephew Yuri supports us with money. My husband does exercises and goes to swim in the sea in Arcadia every morning, but his age speaks of itself, nevertheless. He has been in hospital twice or three times. He had a heart problem and pneumonia. Yuri paid for his stay in hospital. We receive Jewish newspapers and magazines Or Sameach, Shamrey Sabboth and Lechaim, and we get invitations to various events in Hesed. I want my grandchildren to grow up decent people and I want my husband and me to be healthy and to be no burden to anybody. I want piece and wealth to rule in Israel, America and Ukraine, so that we didn't worry about our close and dear ones.

## **Glossary**

### **1 Great Patriotic War**

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

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

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

### **3 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

#### **4 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

#### **5 Romanian occupation of Odessa**

Romanian troops occupied Odessa in October 1941. They immediately enforced anti-Jewish measures. Following the Antonescu-ordered slaughter of the Jews of Odessa, the Romanian occupation authorities deported the survivors to camps in the Golta district: 54,000 to the Bogdanovka camp, 18,000 to the Akhmetchetka camp, and 8,000 to the Domanevka camp. In Bogdanovka all the Jews were shot, with the Romanian gendarmerie, the Ukrainian police, and Sonderkommando R, made up of Volksdeutsche, taking part. In January and February 1942, 12,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered in the two other camps. A total of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews were murdered by Romanian and German army units.

#### **6 Reds**

Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities.

#### **7 Yakir**

One of the founders of the Communist Party in Ukraine. In 1938 he was arrested and executed.

#### **8 Famine in Ukraine**

In 1920 a deliberate famine was introduced in the Ukraine causing the death of millions of people. It was arranged in order to suppress those protesting peasants who did not want to join the collective farms. There was another dreadful deliberate famine in 1930-1934 in the Ukraine. The authorities took away the last food products from the peasants. People were dying in the streets, whole villages became deserted. The authorities arranged this specifically to suppress the rebellious peasants who did not want to accept Soviet power and join collective farms.

#### **9 October Revolution Day**

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

#### **10 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great



Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **11 Levitan Yuriy Borisovich (1914-1983)**

he famous wartime radio announcer. During the Great Patriotic War read the news from front.

### **12 Illichevsk**

Port on the Black Sea, 25 km from Odessa; became a town in 1973.

### **13 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **14 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

### **15 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **16 Or Sameach school in Odessa**

Founded in 1994, this was the first private Jewish school in the city after Ukraine became independent. The language of teaching is Russian, and Hebrew and Jewish traditions are also taught. The school consists of a co-educational primary school and a secondary school separate for boys and for girls. It has about 500 pupils every year.